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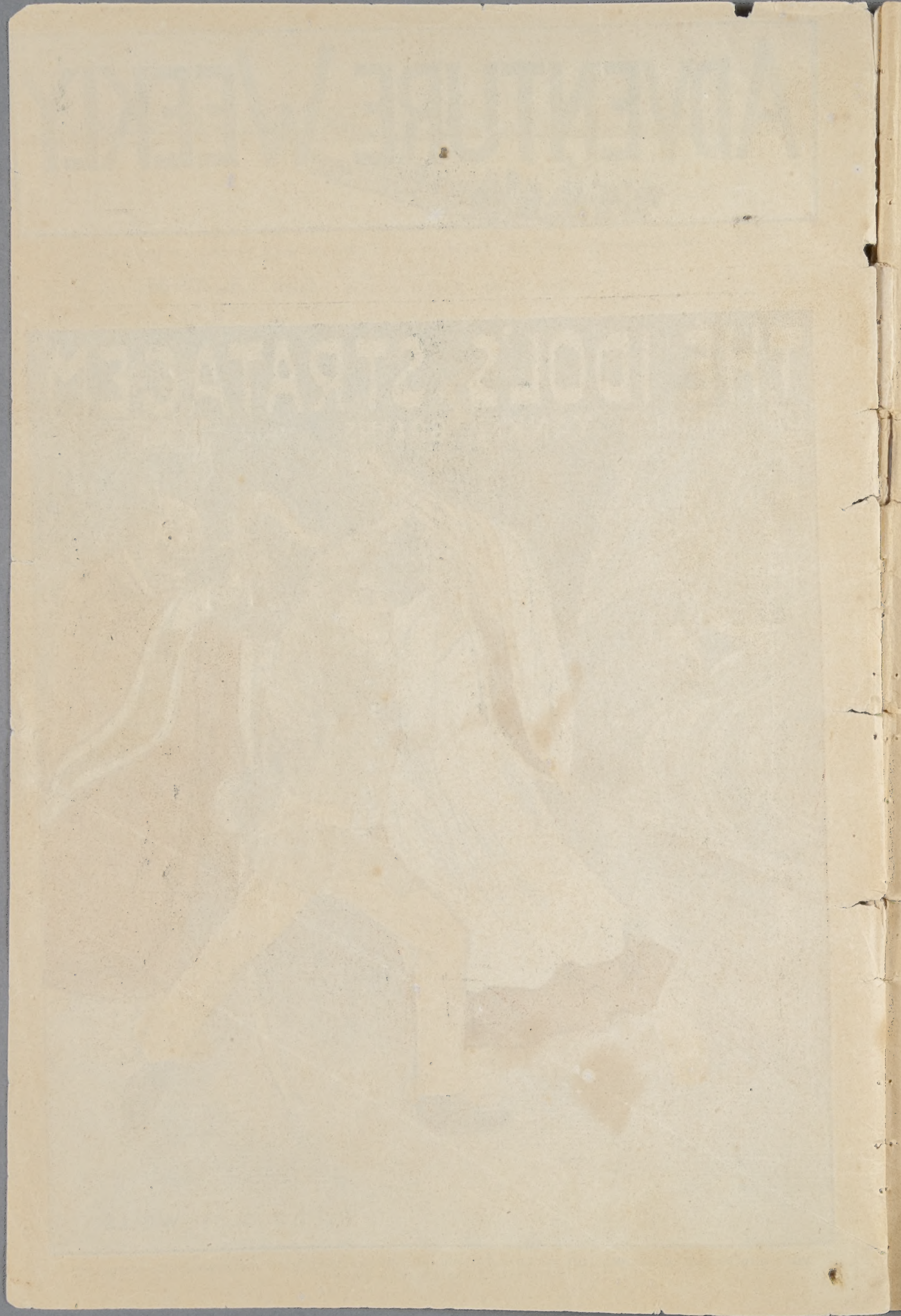
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THE IDOL'S STRATAGEM OR BUDDHAS YANKEE BRAINS



BY DOUGLAS WELLS

WHAT HAD BECOME OF RALPH? PHIL COULD NOT GUESS, BUT HE GRAPPLED WITH HIS POWERFUL ADVERSARY, IGNORANT OF DANGER FROM BEHIND.



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The Idol's Stratagem; OR, *BUDDHA'S YANKEE BRAINS.*

By DOUGLAS WELLS.

First Part.

CHAPTER I.

BRUCE FACES THE CALENDAR.

"Captain Bruce, you are wanted."

"Eh?" muttered the young trooper addressed, opening his eyes and sitting hastily up in bed.

"You are wanted, I say," repeated Ralph Stirling.

"Who wants me?" demanded Claymore Bruce, jumping hastily from his couch.

"Major Stirling directed me to say that Lieutenant Jones has discovered a great deal of untidiness in the quarters of your troop. You are directed to join your lieutenant, who is waiting for you at the stables, and you two are to make a tour of inspection of your men's quarters."

"Those are Phil's orders?"

"They are Major Stirling's orders," corrected Captain Ralph, severely.

"What fine airs we are putting on,"

grumbled Bruce, good-naturedly, "since our troop was increased to a battalion!"

As he spoke, the lanky young captain pulled on his white duck trousers. Next he began to dip water out of a bucket into a basin.

"No, no," interjected Ralph. "Major Stirling directs that you shall attend to the matter with all haste. You are not even to waste the time that would be needed to make your toilet."

"What!" gasped Bruce. "Go out and lecture my troopers for untidiness before I've washed my hands and face? A nice example that would be!"

"The major's orders," snapped Ralph, briskly. "And I'd heed them, for I can assure you that Major Stirling seems mightily put out."

"Orders are orders," declared Bruce, who was every inch a soldier. "Confound it! Somebody has stolen my mirror!"

"I wouldn't grieve because I couldn't prink," rejoined Ralph, so seriously that

Bruce began to wonder what could be in the wind.

So the lanky youth hastily donned his natty fatigue jacket on which glistened the double-barred shoulder straps, dodged into his helmet, and began to buckle his sword belt around his waist as he broke through the doorway of the big markee.

Ralph waited until the tent flap fell into place. Then his face relaxed into the broadest kind of a grin. He did not dare to laugh yet for fear Bruce would overhear him.

"Oh, what a row there'll be when old Bruce finds out!" grinned this delighted young senior captain.

For Bruce, thanks to the absence of his mirror, had not yet discovered that he bore a changed face.

An altered face, a metamorphosed face, a face under a deep shadow, so to speak.

For Bruce, while he slept late that morning, had been made the victim of a strange outrage.

Tim McCarthy, Ralph's old Irish servant, and now a lieutenant in the battalion officered by these young American adventurers, was the author of the outrage.

Bruce was putting in the finishing touches of his "beauty sleep" when McCarthy took such astounding liberties with that same beauty.

Burning the corks of two bottles, Tim had powdered the embers. This powder he had applied, gently, to the whole surface of Bruce's countenance.

Without disturbing the sleeper, Tim had given the young captain a face as black as that of Bruce's first lieutenant, Mr. Jupiter Jones, who rejoiced in the distinction of being one of the tallest and most powerful negroes who walked the earth.

Bruce, suspecting nothing, stepped out of the markee and bent his steps in the direction of the stables belonging to General Ki-yo's Chinese army.

Several Chinese soldiers caught sight of him. They stared in unaffected surprise.

"What the deuce ails them?" ruminated Bruce. "If they belonged to my command they'd reflect on the sin of rudeness in the guard house."

More soldiers, passing by, stopped to gaze at him. At first they may have

taken him for a new officer, possibly a brother of Jupe.

But the black face and undeniably white hands presented such a startling contrast that they stared in open-mouthed astonishment.

Bruce halted, drew himself up.

"If you've any other business, go about it," he called to them in their own language.

Then the yellow soldiers began to have a glimmering of the truth. They knew Bruce by his voice. But what could it mean that his face had grown so intensely black over night? The puzzle was too much for them—so great, indeed, that they forgot the order to move on.

"Are you going?" demanded Bruce, stiffly, "or shall I have you placed under arrest for being within our troop lines?"

Then they turned and walked quickly away, having no relish for the notion of experiencing the discipline of the strict "foreign devil" officers.

"What rotten stuff they're made of!" cried Bruce, glaring after these yellow men, who belonged to a regiment commanded by one of Ki-yo's mandarins. "Why, that riff-raff don't even know enough to salute when an officer speaks to them!"

Resuming his walk, Bruce was soon at the stables.

There stood Jupe, who brought his right hand smartly up to a salute as his captain approached.

"Good morning, lieutenant."

"Morning, Captain Bruce, sah."

"I understand Major Stirling has ordered that you and I shall make an immediate inspection of the quarters of my troop."

"Dat am a fack, sah."

What made Jupe look at him so queerly? Bruce wondered. The darky seemed struggling against inward mirth that threatened at any instant to break into hilarious laughter.

"Come on, then," said Bruce, turning on his heel.

Jupe followed, indulging in the luxury of a broad grin behind his superior officer's back.

"Golly, golly, golly!" chuckled the genuine darky in an undertone. "What am Marse Bruce gwine say when he done

find out? Oh, dere'll be a thundah sto'm, fo' shuah! Why, he done look black ernuff to be mah lil boy. Oh, jess wait twell he done find out!"

Jupe's grin thereatened to become audible.

But just at that moment, Captain Bruce turned. He almost caught the real darky. It was only a lightning-change of expression that prevented the cat from getting out of the bag at once.

"Jupe, what's wrong with me?" demanded Bruce, with a stiff dignity which, under the circumstances, was irresistible.

"Wow!" choked Jupe. "Oh, Lawd!"

"Are you laughing, Jupe?" came the suspicious question.

"Me, Marse Bruce?" questioned the real-thing darky, strangling his laughter, and trying to put on an injured, pained look. "No, sah, Marse Bruce, an' I doan' feel lak laughin', either. I'se done got a nail in mah shoe dat hurts me like eberything. I'se feel heap mo' lak swarin'."

And Jupe affected a limp, which not only supported his claim of a painful shoe, but also gave him a chance to lag behind his troop commander.

"Strange," mused Bruce, as they turned into their company street. "Strange how my men are gaping at me this morning. I'll have to teach them a lesson. Confound it, there are two of them laughing at me, and trying to hide the fact. A dose of guard house——"

He stopped in amazement, for his yellow soldiers, whom discipline did not permit to turn their backs upon him, showed an inclination to run away in order to laugh unrestrainedly.

"Jupe," demanded Bruce, in a pained voice, "do you see anything wrong with me?"

"Anything wrong wid yo'?" repeated Jupe, in a strangled tone. "Why, subtenly not, Marse Bruce—subtenly not."

"Then why are you laughing at me, you rascal? What ails these Chinamen? What makes them want to run away as soon as they've had a second look at me?"

"I dunno," asserted Jupe, with prize gravity. "I'se hain't done notice it, sah."

"Turn out, there," commanded Bruce, halting before the door of one of the troop's tents.

Six Chinamen came out, saluting, yet gazing very hard at their captain.

Bruce, choosing to ignore them, strode into their tent.

"Well, this tent is certainly in apple-pie order," commented the young captain, after staring about.

As he came outside, the six yellow troopers ranged up in a line and saluted, but they seemed on the point of going into convulsions.

"Turn out for inspection of quarters," roared Bruce, halting before the second tent in the street.

Six more Mongols tumbled out, saluting as they had been taught by their officers.

Bruce hardly deigned to look at them, but strode into the tent followed by Jupe.

"These quarters are all right, too," nodded the mystified captain. "The major himself couldn't keep things in better shape."

As Bruce finished, he heard a snicker outside.

Striding through the doorway, he called out sternly:

"See here, my man, if you think inspection of quarters is a farce, the occupants of the first dirty tent we find will learn their mistake."

All the troopers in sight tried to look serious, but from behind a tent not far away came sounds of choking laughter.

"Lieutenant," said Bruce, stiffly, "go and see who is laughing. If you catch any one in the act, send him to the guard house for disrespect."

"Yes, sah," rejoined Jupe, hurrying off, yet feeling quite sure that no one would go to the guard house.

More and more nettled, Captain Bruce dove into the third tent.

More snickering followed his disappearance from sight.

"Confound them," snapped the nettled officer. "What can be the matter with me, anyway? Eh?—eh?"

For out of the corner of his eye he had caught sight of the blackened tip of his nose.

"A smooch there," ruminated the boy. "Is that the sight that has set every one laughing?"

Out came his handkerchief. He applied it to the end of his nose. He got more

soot than he expected to—more by at least a couple of square inches.

Bruce gazed at the soiled handkerchief in blank amazement.

Catching sight of a polished steel mirror in a corner of the tent, he pounced upon it—held it up for a close view.

"Suffering saints and sinners!" ejaculated the overcome junior captain.

Down to the floor fell the mirror, landing with a ringing ping.

There was a bucket of water in the corner. Bruce dipped his handkerchief into it. Recovering the mirror, he sopped his face, removing the burnt cork with frantic haste. Two more handkerchiefs came into requisition before he had the black stuff fairly well off.

"No wonder they laughed! Oh, somebody will have to dance! Wait till I find that somebody!" gritted the lanky youth, striding out into the open air. "Lieutenant!"

But Jupe was not to be seen. He had vanished.

Too overcome by wounded dignity to ask any questions of the yellow men, Bruce walked energetically over to the marquee occupied by the American adventurers.

"That inspection can wait," he grumbled. "Major Phil Stirling's orders be—be hornswoiggled! Confound him, I believe he is at the bottom of this whole campaign of sin and outrage!"

Bruce tramped into the marquee with fire in his eye.

But there wasn't any conflagration just then, for he had the whole of the big tent to himself.

"Now, for a real wash," gritted the lanky captain, half stripping.

While he was still at work over a through toilet, a newcomer entered.

It was Wun Ching, interpreter to the Americans, who had about outgrown his usefulness since the youngsters had picked up a very fair command of the language for themselves.

"General Ki-yo wants to see you at once," announced Wun Ching.

"Me?" questioned Bruce. "Are you sure? It's generally Major Stirling for whom he sends."

"It is you whom he wants to see this time," said Wun Ching, positively.

Bruce lingered only until he had rendered himself presentable to the yellow general in command of the imperial army, then hurried off to his excellency's tent.

"General Ki-yo is taking a bath," said one of the soldiers on guard before the door. "He sent out word that you are to go to the Mandarin Hu Ten."

So Bruce tramped off to Hu Ten's tent. The mandarin received him, but quickly replied:

"I was to tell you that Lee, the caterer, wants to see you."

"Lee?" repeated Bruce, mystified.

"Yes; I do not know the nature of the matter, but I have General Ki-yo's assurance that it is important."

"This is a slight come-down, from a general to a cook," mused Bruce, as he resumed his tramp. "However, China is a queer, upside-down country."

Lee, a big, genial-looking Chinaman, was waiting for him with an appearance of great interest.

"You wanted to see me?" began the young captain.

"Yep; belly much."

"Talk quickly, then."

"All light," rejoined Lee. "How much cheap you sellee eggs?"

"Eggs?" gasped Bruce, thunderstruck.

"Yep; you sellee cheap, I buy."

"Eggs, you blockhead? Do you take me for a peddler?"

"One piece man allee same tell me you catchee plenty heap eggs from Melica," rejoined Lee, urbanely; "plenty eggs, not over six months old."

Bruce glared at the fat fellow, uncertain whether to knock him down.

"Who told you that?" he demanded.

"One piecee black giant."

"Lieutenant Jupe Jones?"

"Yep; all same him."

"This is where the nigger dies," murmured Bruce, walking off with a tragic air, all his hot southern blood aflame at the liberties that had been taken with him that morning.

He regained the marquee, strode inside, and found his comrades seated at breakfast.

His brow dark with wrath Bruce strode up to the table.

"Gentlemen," he announced, stiffly,

"I'm sorry to spoil a pleasant occasion, but—but I've got to have satisfaction."

"Captain," retorted Phil Stirling, rising from his place and gripping Bruce's arm, "come with me."

Phil marched him straight over to the wall of the tent, saying tersely:

"Gaze!"

Bruce found himself confronted by the calendar.

"Observe the date," requested Phil.

Claymore Bruce did so.

A "sold" flush mantled his brow, spreading downward over his entire face.

For the date was:

April 1!

CHAPTER II.

SAME OLD DAY!

"I haven't a word to say," gasped abashed Bruce.

"Wise boy," nodded Ralph.

"But I'm doing a heap of thinking."

"Surely, that's novel!"

"A fellow who forgets the date on the first of April has got to put up with more or less nonsense, I suppose," grumbled the lanky youth, approaching the table. "But couldn't you have tried something that wouldn't make a fool of me before my troop?"

Phil began to laugh heartily, observing:

"One such experience won't demoralize your men."

"And it was almost as bad," muttered Bruce, taking his seat at the table, "to make me pose before that heathen cook as a vender of diseased eggs."

But a general roar of laughter drowned out his complaints. Even Bruce was obliged to join in the merriment, though he did it with a sheepish face that impeached his sincerity.

"I hope the breakfast is all right," grumbled the lanky youth, suspiciously.

"Croquettes of curried rice and mutton," replied Phil, helping his comrade from the platter.

It was a favorite dish with Claymore. With his fork he sliced off a generous bite and transferred it to his mouth.

"Wow! murder!" he sputtered, spitting it out upon the floor and making a desperate dive for the water bottle.

He rushed to the door, making frantic speed to rinse his mouth. There were tears in his eyes when he came back.

"Gug—gug—gug—good, isn't it?" stuttered Job Jinks, while the others displayed a gravity worthy of aged men.

"What's in it?" demanded Claymore, savagely.

"Seasoning," replied Phil, quietly.

"Great Scott! What's it seasoned with—vitriol?"

At this there came a burst of uncontrollable laughter.

"There's cayenne pepper in it," answered Phil. "I suppose the cook got rather too much in the one you tried to eat."

"Tried to eat—that expresses it," roared the lanky youth. "Confound the rule of society that makes it impossible for a fellow to fight a duel with his friends."

"Av yez rarely want a duel, Captain Bruce," said Tim, laying down his knife and fork, "maybe Oi can accommodate yez."

"No thank you," retorted Bruce, loftily. "If I were to honor you with such a meeting, I haven't a doubt that you'd shoot me with a wax bullet loaded with ink. I'm not taking any chances with such a lot of hyenas on the first of April."

Smiling, Phil helped Bruce to another croquette. Bruce nibbled at it gingerly until he ascertained that it was all right.

After that the breakfast went on smoothly enough, though Claymore, who felt that he was under a cloud of hilarity, was ever suspicious.

Our adventurers had been in camp now for two weeks, without any campaigning.

During that time, General Ki-yo had made a spectacular march of twenty miles to the southward, without, however, encountering any of the armies of Tai-ping rebels whom he held an imperial commission to exterminate.

Job Jinks, during this fortnight of idleness, had nearly recovered from the horrible effects of his eight days of hideous captivity at Hui Tan.

Underneath the natty uniform which he wore so jauntily there yet lingered many scars inflicted by the slave drivers of the Valley of Horrors. Many of the

scars would undoubtedly remain in the flesh as long as Jinks lived.

During this fortnight, however, nothing had been seen of John Ashley, the English scoundrel who was responsible for Job's capture, slavery and suffering.

While the wrath of our adventurers was at its heat it would have fared ill with Ashley if he had fallen into their hands.

But he remained away, without the slightest clue to his whereabouts.

Indeed, it looked as if he had disappeared permanently. Yet he had been the evil genius of the Americans for so long that his prolonged absence was a dream that seemed almost too good to be true.

"He's not here now," was the way Major Phil Stirling summarized the situation. "When he is, it will be time enough to waste thought on him."

Ever increasing the size of his command, Phil had now a battalion of two hundred Chinamen, the pick of the army for courage, strength, discipline and the other-soldierly qualities.

He had organized them into two troops. Himself the major, he had made Ralph senior captain and Bruce junior.

Tim was Ralph's first lieutenant, while Jupe held a similar post under Bruce.

Ah Wing, a Mongol who had been with Phil from the first, and who had proved his worth on a score of occasions, had won promotion to the post of Ralph's second lieutenant.

Wing's brother, Kong, who had also earned promotion, was Bruce's second lieutenant.

Nothing could exceed the importance of these two Mongols now, for a Chinese coolie worships authority, especially when it is suddenly vested in himself.

Wing and Kong could not be expected to live longer in the quarters of the battalion. They had a small but special marquee of their own, and each reveled in the luxury of a servant.

Job Jinks had found his most fitting place as adjutant and aide to the commandant.

Yet, since the battalion had been organized and ready for duty, there had been one serious drawback.

There was nothing to do!

General Ki-yo, satisfied with his pre-

vious victories—which, by the way, had been won for him by the American adventurers—had been content to rest upon his laurels.

Had he made a resolute campaign, this yellow Napoleon could have seen the end of the Tai-ping rebellion against the emperor within three months.

But this was just what the old yellow warrior didn't mean to do.

Apart from his personal dislike for fighting, he realized that when there was no more fighting to be done against the Tai-pings, the value of his supposed services would cease on the same day, for the government of China is not proverbially grateful to heroes of whom it has no further need.

So Ki-yo dawdled, determined not to end the rebellion too suddenly.

Taking heart through his inactivity, the Tai-pings were reorganizing their scattered armies, gathering in more supplies, and preparing for a decisive stroke which, they hoped, would result in eventual triumph.

"We're ready, when wanted," said Phil Stirling to his comrades at breakfast on this morning, when the subject of Ki-yo's masterly inactivity came up.

Bruce wandered out to the door as they left the table.

While he stood there, he saw a soldier approaching who wore the uniform of the native battery commanded by Captain Spencer, Ki-yo's English officer.

In another moment the soldier, saluting twice, had put a letter in Bruce's hands and retreated.

Bruce broke the seal of the perfumed envelope.

This is what he read:

"Miss Flora Spencer presents her compliments to Captain Bruce, and begs that he will call upon her this forenoon. Miss Spencer desires to consult Captain Bruce on a confidential matter of some importance to herself."

"All right," mused Claymore, thrusting the missive inside his blouse. "But I won't let these wild animals know where I'm going."

Stepping inside, he made his most careful toilet, then set out for Captain Spencer's marquee.

The same yellow soldier who had brought the letter was loitering outside the tent.

Saluting, he held the flap open for the young American captain to enter.

Bruce found himself in the familiar apartment which both the captain and his daughter used as a sitting-room.

She was not there.

"Will be soon, I suppose," mused Claymore, taking a seat. "Girls always have to prink up a bit before they see their guests. Wonder what she wants to see me about, anyway?"

It seemed as if his curiosity was not to be quickly gratified, for time slipped by slowly without any more sign of the young lady.

Bruce began to fume.

An hour was up when the recent bearer of the letter came inside.

"Will Miss Spencer see me soon?" inquired the lanky youth.

"Missee Spencer?" repeated the Chinaman, appearing surprised.

"Yes, certainly; Miss Spencer."

"She allee same not here."

"Not here?" cried Bruce, rising.

"May I ask where she is?"

"She and her father allee same go away last night, for thlee day."

"But you brought me a note from her an hour ago," protested the bewildered youth.

"Not ffrom Missee Spencer," declared the Chinaman, opening his eyes very wide.

"Then who in blazes did give you that note?" insisted Bruce, with rising wrath.

"All same Mafor Sti'ling."

"Major Stir——"

With a tempestuous explosion of rage, Bruce darted out of the tent.

At first he headed for the American marquee, but he was not many seconds in changing his mind.

"I won't go there!" he growled. "They'll guy the buttons off my coat. I'd better crawl in somewhere and hide until the first of April is over!"

Tramping angrily off, Bruce found the seclusion he sought in a shady dell a few hundred yards away.

"If they don't see me at morning drill," he rumbled, "I shan't be the one to blame."

Rustle! Something made a crinkling sound as his back touched the ground.

Like a flash he sat up. But there was nothing on the ground to explain the sound.

A new idea dawning, Bruce slipped off his blouse.

To the back of it was pinned a large sheet of paper.

It was inscribed in English and Chinese, and the words were these:

"This swain a-wooing goes when his lady is away from home!"

"And I've been displaying this three-sheet poster through the camp?" grunted Bruce, in deep disgust. "Say, it isn't safe for me to be alive!"

CHAPTER III.

"I DON'T THINK!"

For half an hour Bruce lay there, lazily watching the cloud-flecked sky.

"The fellows are after me to-day, and no mistake," he mused. "Why? I wonder if it has any connection with that incident when I—well, when I was suspected of—putting a plank under the sheet in each of their beds?"

But time began to drag on the lanky youth's spirits.

"They're at morning drill, now," he mused, looking at his watch. "Wonder if there's a chance for me to slip into the marquee and get a book, without being seen and placed under arrest?"

He decided to try it, anyway.

Gaining the marquee, he started to enter.

Whack! bump! splash!

A water pail thudded on the floor, falling from overhead.

Half-drenched, Bruce stood sputtering in disgust.

"My determination to keep away from here to-day was a wise one," he grunted. "I'll get that book and fly."

Finding the book, he started for the door.

Before he could get out he was confronted by one of the minor officers from Ki-yo's headquarters.

"Hello," greeted the Chinaman.

"Well, what's wanted?"

"Gen'l Ki-yo all same send you this."

His caller held out a large ebony box.

"What is it?" glared Bruce.

"Plesent for you."

"No, you don't!" roared Bruce. "I've seen the calendar! Get out!"

"But Gen'l Ki-yo him say——"

"I don't care a blamed continental what he says!" raged Bruce. "He says too much, anyway."

"Then you not take?" questioned the Chinese officer, imperturbably.

"What is it, anyway?" demanded Claymore, who began to doubt, after all, that the intensely dignified old yellow Napoleon would allow himself to be mixed up with a joke.

"How me sabe what?" demanded the Mongol. "You open, you all same see."

"That sounds reasonable enough," growled Bruce, taking the box. "But if you knew what harrowing experiences I've had to-day you wouldn't wonder at my being suspicious."

He opened the box, but his eyes soon bulged with wonder.

For the box was filled with soiled underclothing!

"What I tell Gen'l Ki-yo?" asked the Mongol.

"Tell him to go to——" roared Bruce, but quickly paused, as a new light of suspicion came into his eyes, and he went on:

"Who told you to bring this here?"

"Him Major Stir——"

"Oh, he did?" glared Bruce, shutting the box lid with a bang.

"Yep; him Major Stirling say you no good soldier; that you allee same stop fighting, and start laundlee!"

"A laundry?"

Bruce rose to his feet, with a dangerous light in his eyes.

He knew as well as he needed to, now, that this Chinese officer was a party to this latest outrage, for surely Ki-yo would believe no such fantastic tale.

It didn't require much astuteness for the Mongol to decide that he was in danger.

Without waiting to recover the box which Bruce was bringing to him with long bounds, the yellow fellow turned and fled.

Steaming after him, Claymore raised the box above his head.

Whirl! Bruce flung the box after the fugitive.

Its end struck that unlucky Chinaman back of the legs with such force that the halted fugitive sat down forcibly upon the lid.

Crash! The lid splintered under the weight.

Then there came a piercing yell from the heathen, for a thin line of his own tender flesh was caught fast in the crack in the lid.

Springing to his feet, the Mongol carried the box up with him, the ebony affair presenting a grotesque sight in the shape of a thick black patch on the seat of his trousers.

"You take him off?" begged the Mongol.

"I'll take your head off!" raged Bruce. "That's what I'll do."

He didn't, though, for the Chinaman, yanking the box away with a slight loss of epidermis, made haste to get away from this irascible American officer.

Grabbing up the book, Bruce hurried off to his retreat.

From a distance he heard, at intervals, the clear notes of a cavalry bugle.

"Troop B is getting along without its captain this morning," mused Claymore turning over a page. "Phil will fume, but he mustn't expect to have all the fun."

Troop B certainly was one officer short that morning. At roll call Jupe, as acting commander, reported Bruce as "on sick-list."

In spite of themselves, the other Americans smiled at the darky's serious manner.

Nevertheless, Phil was a trifle provoked with his lanky comrade, for on this morning our hero had planned to march the battalion to Ki-yo's headquarters to be reviewed by that yellow Napoleon.

It was a fine showing that the young major's command made, drawn up in two long lines.

There was a flourish of bugles by the trumpeters, then Phil himself dismounted before the old general's door, went inside, and invited him to come out.

Ki-yo came. At sight of the martial array, so far ahead of anything China had seen before, the eyes of even his fossilized excellency glistened.

"Would your excellency care to have

me put the battalion through a few manœuvres?" asked Phil.

"No, no; not now," replied Ki-yo. "Come inside. I have much to say to you."

Rather mystified, Phil nodded to Ralph, then followed his yellow general into the markee.

Ki-yo sat down, but did not invite his young subordinate to take a seat.

"You have some fine soldiers," said the general, speaking in his own tongue. "It is well. I have work for them to do at once."

"At once?" murmured Phil.

"Certainly. Your soldiers do not need sleep before they ride a few miles?"

There was veiled sarcasm in the question. Phil, perceiving it, flushed hotly.

"We are always ready, your excellency."

"You know where the village of Lo Beng is?"

"I do not."

"No matter. I can furnish you with a guide who will take you there straight. But it is to a cave two miles from Lo Beng that I want you to go. The cave has just been discovered, and in it is a priceless treasure."

"A treasure," repeated Phil.

"Not in the sense of money or jewels," resumed Ki-yo. "The treasure I speak of is a bronze figure of Buddha. It is the first that was brought into China from India. That was more than two thousand years ago, as our sages write. More than three hundred years ago it disappeared. It was believed to have been stolen from a temple in Nankin by rebels. It was found yesterday by a woodman, who, while digging in the ground at the roots of a tree, felt his spade sinking deeper into the earth than it should have done. In that way he discovered the cave. Later, he found larger entrance over which the jungle had grown. That woodman sent his son running to me with a description of the idol, which lies on its back in the cave. By reading in the works of our old writers I have found within this hour that the idol in the cave near Lo Beng is the very Indian Buddha which so long ago disappeared."

"And you want us to get it?" questioned Phil.

Ki-yo stared at his interlocutor in amazement.

"Certainly I want it. I command it. We must have the idol in camp before sunrise to-morrow. Nothing else could make me more famous than this great achievement. You will start at once—lose not a minute! Do not pause to give your horses water, for——"

Here the yellow general's voice sank to an agitated whisper:

"I have also learned that word of the discovery had been sent to the Tai-ping rebels. By this time they may have even an army hastening to the scene. They would exult if they could get this figure of Buddha away from the imperial soldiers."

"And suppose by the time we get there they have already got it?" asked Phil.

"They mustn't get it!" screamed his excellency.

"Yet, if they have," insisted our hero, "where are they likely to take it?"

"They would take it to their fortified city of Kan Sing."

"Which would put me to the trouble of taking the city of Kan Sing."

"You couldn't capture Kan Sing," rejoined Ki-yo, with a disdainful smile. "Two years ago an imperial army of sixty thousand soldiers attacked Kan Sing for three months. It is impregnable, perched as it is on the top of a rocky hill, and with walls eighty feet in thickness."

Phil looked thoughtful.

"Well," questioned Ki-yo, impatiently, "why do you dally? Hasten, and bring back to me the Indian Buddha, as you value my friendship and good will."

"Your excellency," exclaimed Phil Stirling, saluting, "I shall start within two minutes by my watch. But where is the guide of whom you spoke?"

Clapping his hands, Ki-yo caused a young Chinaman of twenty to enter from the next apartment.

"This is Ah Shen, the wood-chopper's son. He will take you to the cave, which is fifteen miles from here. Now make your horses throw up the dust!"

Saluting, and hurrying outside, Phil vaulted into saddle and raced to the door of the American markee.

But Bruce was not inside.

Calling one of his servants, Phil hurriedly scribbled a note.

"Find Captain Bruce, without an instant's delay," he ordered. "Give this note into his own hands the instant you find him."

With that, Phil galloped off. No sooner did he reach the head of his column than he gave the order:

"Forward!"

A half an hour later, Bruce, having read his book until tired of it, decided to return to the marquee for another.

Hardly had he got inside of the marquee when the servant, rushing inside, thrust the note into his hands.

"Eh?" muttered the junior captain, glaring at the paper.

This is what he read:

"As soon as you read this, mount and take the southeast road from the camp. Join us as quickly as possible. We are off on great business. There wasn't even time to wait to find you. Hurry, with all the speed there is in you! Phil."

But Bruce winked incredulously at the calendar.

"I've had my attention called to the date, a few times before to-day."

Stretching his lanky length on the couch, he closed his eyes for a nap.

"Ride like fury to the southeast, eh?" he murmured. "I don't think!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE INDIAN BUDDHA.

"How much further, Ah Shen?"

"Not above four miles, excellency."

"We should be there, then, in less than an hour."

Turning in saddle, Phil glanced backward over the long column of his troopers.

He nodded approvingly on noting that horses and men had stood the swift, forced march remarkably well.

"But I'm sorry about Bruce," mused the young commander. "He is taking his revenge by hiding, little dreaming that we have real work on hand, and that he is left out."

They were trotting up a long, winding

road, with Job and a dozen troopers well in advance.

Suddenly Job began to signal back to our hero.

"What does he mean?" pondered the puzzled commander.

Job was making gestures backward.

"He doesn't mean for us to retreat," surmised Phil, "for he himself is still riding forward. Hold on; I have it. He is pointing at something to our rear."

Riding to the side of the road, Stirling halted and wheeled about.

But he could see nothing back of the long column of horsemen.

Putting spurs to his steed, Phil galloped forward.

"What is it, Job?"

"Some one riding after us."

"By Jove, so there is," murmured Phil, glancing down the road, of which he had a better view at this elevation.

"A messenger trying to overtake us?" suggested the little fellow.

"Thunder, no! It's surely old Bruce. He has heard from me at last."

Bruce it was. In another ten minutes, dusty and on a horse badly winded, Claymore reached the head of the column.

"Reported, major," called Bruce, riding up and saluting.

"Glad of it," replied Phil. "But what delayed you so? Failed to get my note?"

"Got it an hour before I started," admitted Troop B's captain.

"Oh, I understand," nodded Phil, a smile lurking in his eyes.

"Thought it was another blamed outrage—a scheme to send me over the country raising dust," grumbled Bruce. "Finally, though, I went out to the stables and found the horses gone—all except mine. Then I hurried over to Ki-yo's. He seemed astounded. Wanted to know if you'd failed. Told him I hadn't the least idea what he meant, but that at last accounts you hadn't failed. He ordered me into saddle quicker than lightning, and sent a soldier to get me on the right road. That's all I know, except that I've caught up with you at last."

Bruce finished, almost as much out of breath as his steed.

"And you don't know our work for to-day?" questioned Phil.

"Not a word of it."

As they rode side by side, Phil hurriedly recounted the story of the Indian Buddha.

"So after doing all the other queer jobs in the world, we're sent out collecting junk?" snorted Troop B's captain, disgustedly.

"Not quite as bad as that," smiled Phil. "Ki-yo says it will be a famous achievement if we succeed in bringing the idol back. Besides, I've got a further idea——"

"Well?"

"Perhaps I had better not discuss it just yet. I haven't told any of the others yet."

"Satisfied to remain at your orders, major," replied Claymore, saluting and falling back to the head of his troop.

In a valley to the right of them lay the little village of Lo Beng.

Phil, who had good reasons of his own, ordered the guide not to take them toward the village, but around it.

During the last two miles of the march, Phil sent out several small scouting parties.

If a force of Tai-pings were marching to the same scene, he did not intend to come upon them unawares.

"Yonder is the cave," cried Ah Shen, twenty minutes later.

The entrance to it, now cleared of jungle, lay through a broad, deep gully.

Halting the battalion, and leaving Jupe in command of it, Phil followed by his other four comrades, went on foot in the wake of Ah Shen.

Halting at the mouth of the cave, Ah Shen threw himself upon the ground.

"Well, why don't you lead us inside?" demanded Phil.

"Excellencies," replied Shen, in an awed tone, "I beg that you will bare your feet before you tread further."

As he spoke, Shen removed his own felt-soled shoes.

"We'll keep our shoes on," nodded Phil, smilingly. "We couldn't fight without them. Lead on."

Ah Shen looked dubious, but when he received another peremptory command, he rose and glided into the cave.

Just before entering, Job lighted a torch.

Whirr-rr! whirr-rr! The air was full of swarming bats. Disturbed by the light, these little night-fliers banged their wings and bodies against the walls in a frantic, blind effort to get away from fancied danger.

Ah Shen went on, but slowly. Awed by the presence he was approaching, he halted to kow-tow at every few steps.

"Faster!" muttered Phil, but Shen pretended not to hear him.

To go a hundred feet in this fashion required nearly five minutes.

"We can't waste time like this," grumbled Phil. "Out of the way, Shen. You can follow after us."

But the coolie, uttering a cry of rebuke, darted ahead of them, heedless of the gloom ahead.

After him they pelted, until Shen's voice rang out:

"Halt, excellencies, and on your knees! You are in the presence of the famous image of divine Buddha!"

Holding the light aloft, Phil found Shen on his knees, kow-towing repeatedly.

Just ahead of the coolie loomed up a big mass of metal.

"The idol!" cried Phil, enthusiastically, heedless of Shen's pious remonstrances against this fashion of entering so sacred a presence.

It was an enormous affair, they saw as they crowded about it. Fourteen feet in length, the bronze Buddha reclined upon its side.

Moldy and tarnished from its rest of centuries in this forgotten cave, the idol gave them only an impression of massiveness.

"How are we ever going to take this to camp?" snorted Phil, disgustedly. "It's a job for a freight train. Why on earth couldn't Ki-yo give us some idea of the magnitude of the undertaking?"

"Some one had to bring it in here," answered Ralph, "so I suppose it is within the scope of human powers to get the ugly old thing out again."

"They got it in here," rejoined Phil, "by the aid of hundreds of laborers. They moved it on huge wooden rollers, if this is any indication."

He struck his toe against a mass of decayed wood under the idol, a bit of des-

ecration which made Shen open his eyes to their widest and tremble.

After walking twice more around the idol, Phil asked:

"Job, what thickness of logs would we need for rollers to move this tarnished thing on?"

"At lul-lul-least two feet," answered Jinks.

"And how many rollers?"

"Fuf-fuf-fuf-forty."

"A day's job for a couple of hundred wood-cutters!" exclaimed Phil, impatiently. "Hundreds more to haul on ropes. Ki-yo is an infernal ass to think we can undertake such a task."

"What's to be done?" ventured Bruce.

"Camp here, to defend the cave; first of all," was Major Phil's reply. "Next, we'll make an estimate of what we need in the way of laborers, tools and trucks. We'll send a courier to Ki-yo and wait until he sends us what we need."

"The general will faint when he gets your message," laughed Ralph. "He is so accustomed to having us do all that he expects of us that we've spoiled him. He may even refuse to send us what we ask for."

"If he does," grunted Phil, "this blamed old idol can rot here before we attempt the impossible."

To emphasize his determination, Phil struck his riding boot against the mass of bronze.

A cry of terror burst from Shen's lips. To the Chinaman this blasphemy of kicking Buddha was awful.

"Shen, you had better go outside. Leave us," directed Phil.

But the Chinaman did not stir until Bruce, catching him by the shoulders, wheeled him about and gave him a push toward the mouth of the cave.

"Now," went on Stirling, "we can make our inspection without fear of that heathen's reproaches. Job, what do you estimate this pile of bronze to weigh?"

"I was c-c-c-c-c-calculating," stammered Jinks. "The idol is ho-ho-ho-ho-hollow, and the average th-th-th-th-th-thickness is——"

"Oh, give us a rough guess without going into details."

But this Job refused to do until he had

figured industriously with paper and pencil for some minutes.

"Well?" insisted Phil, as he little fellow looked up.

"R-r-r-r-rather more than eleven tons."

Phil turned a disgusted face to his comrades.

"You hear?" he cried. "It weighs as much as a small locomotive. This is a queer job for cavalymen."

As he spoke, he rested one hand on a projection in the back of the idol.

Giving it a yank, Phil stared in astonishment at the result.

A door, some two and a half feet in width and four in length, swung open in the back of the idol.

"Why, there's a regular cubby-hole in here!" he exclaimed, thrusting his head through to explore. Floor and all—a little room some five feet in height."

"For the pup—pup-priests," nodded Job. "Sus-sus-sometimes they want to make the worshippers think they were hearing a m-m-m-m-message from Buddha. They stand in there, and talk through the mum-mum-mouth of the idol."

"And the worshippers hear, believe and obey," laughed Phil. "What a handy way to get rich worshippers to make a donation for a temple, for instance!"

"Or money enough to support the heathen priests in luxury," suggested Ralph.

"Its a pity," mused Phil, "that we couldn't preach to the Tai-pings from the mouth of this idol, and persuade them that their rebellion against the emperor is a crime that must be abandoned if Buddha is to be propitiated."

"But all this," grunted Bruce, "has nothing to do with getting this junk-heap over to Ki-yo's camp."

"Job, make an estimate of what we need in the way of tools and labor," directed Phil.

This Jinks began to do with an air of the greatest deliberation.

Suddenly, all were startled by a voice which rang with sepulchral suggestiveness in the cavern.

It was only Lieutenant Ah Wing, however, as they discovered an instant later.

"Major, major!" he cried, panting as

he ran forward. "Plenty Tai-ping coming this way!"

"Eh?" cried Stirling, starting up.

"How far away? How many?"

"Maybe thlee mile off—whole army."

"Hustle out of here, then," ordered Phil, himself heading the rush.

Leaping into the saddle outside, they raced to the top of the hill.

From there, through their glasses, they had an excellent view of the distant column marching their way.

"There are not less than two thousand of them, horse and foot," cried Phil.

"Fight?" drawled Bruce.

"Not by a long sight," retorted Phil.

Second Part.

CHAPTER V.

BY THE IDOL ROUTE.

"Not fight?" cried Ralph, incredulously.

"Is it run away, d'yez mane?" glowered Tim.

"Or put a sign up against trespassing?" drawled Bruce.

Job kept silent. He saw the sparkle of excitement in Phil's eyes, and realized that the leader had some new, daring plan in hand.

"Fellows," announced Major Phil, "I believe I will let those Tai-pings have the idol."

"A nice scheme," grunted Bruce.

Upon him Phil turned reproachfully.

"Old chap," he demanded, "have you so soon forgotten the date?"

"What has the date got to do with it?"

"We'll let the enemy get the idol."

"Well?"

"They can handle it, for I see that they are well provided with men and trucks. They've come better prepared than we did, for depend upon it, they are commanded by a man of more brains than Ki-yo. So we will let them have the idol. It will be the worst thing they ever got hold of."

"But they'll take it to the city of Kan Sing," protested Bruce.

"I'd be terribly disappointed if they didn't."

"What in the world are you driving at, old fellow?"

"You'll know before the night is over," smiled the leader, enjoying his friend's mystification, "for I intend to give the command of the battalion over to you and you'll have a most important part to play."

"A part for which I'm splendidly prepared," grumbled Claymore, "since I don't know a blessed thing about it. Why don't you come out with the scheme?"

"A word with Ralph, first."

The two cousins conversed apart in whispers.

It was not long before the on-lookers saw the Maryland boy's eyes light up.

Then he nodded eagerly.

"I'm with you," he declared, heartily grasping his cousin's hand.

"That's a blamed sight more than the rest of us can say," put in Bruce.

"We're going to play an April fool joke on the Chinese," replied Phil, mysteriously, as the pair rejoined their comrades.

"Are we? I should say so!" exclaimed Ralph.

"But the rest of us don't see where the laugh comes in," observed Tim McCarthy.

"You will, later on," predicted Phil. "Now, Bruce, for your part. You will take all of the battalion except twenty men, and make off from here as quickly as possible."

"Where?"

"That makes little difference, so long as you get out of sight. Hide your men, for the Tai-pings mustn't see them, nor know that you're around. Late to-night, Bruce you will approach the city of Kan Sing. Come forward with half a dozen men to the main gate. We will try to meet you there."

"We?" repeated Bruce. "Who?"

"Ralph and I. We will get word to you, somehow, and then the second act of our great April fool joke will begin."

"Is the second act as easy to understand as the first?" Bruce inquired, with withering sarcasm.

"It will all be clear then," declared Phil. "Do you notice how Job takes it? He is still waiting for his part to be

assigned, without saying anything. Job, you and twenty of the men want to be found near the mouth of the cave by the Tai-pings. You will make a show of fighting, but must take pains to allow yourself to be put to flight by superior numbers."

"Shure, that won't be harrud," remarked Tim, "since the Tape-worm divils will outnumber him a hundred toimes."

"Now, off with you all," directed Phil. "Let each do his part well, and to-night the people of Kan Sing will hear something drop."

Couriers had already been sent to call in the outposts of scouts.

Near the cave's mouth the whole command was by this time assembled, out of sight of the Tai-pings, who were still some three-quarters of an hour's march away.

Job grouped his twenty men near the cave. Bruce, at the head of the remainder, trotted away to seclusion.

"Come with us a few minutes, Job," requested the leader, thrusting his arm through the little fellows.

Job went with the cousins into the cave, but he was careful not to put any of the questions that were buzzing through his brain.

Over one arm Ralph carried two suits of Chinese clothing, since Phil thought they might need them later on for purpose of disguise.

"Dry goods are stowed away," announced Ralph, tossing the garments in through the door in the idol's back.

"I wish we had a mattress," said Phil. "That isn't going to make the most comfortable stateroom in the world."

Job's grave little eyes were almost bulging.

"You're wondering what's up," chuckled Phil.

"Yes."

"Ralph and I are going to Kan Sing."

"Inside the idol?"

"You've guessed it. In with you, Ralph."

"You'll have a rough time, jolted around in this great mass of metal," exclaimed Job.

"We're prepared for it," nodded Phil. "A few more hard knocks won't hurt us, I guess."

"But suppose they don't take the idol to Kan Sing?"

"Then our plans will go crooked. But you must tell Bruce to make sure that Buddha does go to Kan Sing—that is, he must be certain whether it does or not. But to Kan Sing this old mass of bronze is surely bound. That city is only a few miles from here, and it is the only near-by place where the Tai-pings would feel that their prize was safe. Ah! One thing more—that rope must go with us. Thank you."

Stepping through the door, Phil ensconced himself inside the idol.

"Good-by, little one," he cried, holding out his hand.

"And tell Bruce we depend on him," added Ralph, also shaking Job's hand.

Bang! The heavy door of bronze was shut fast.

"You see, there's a bolt here on the inside," whispered Phil, to his cousin. "There, I've slipped it. We'll be tolerably safe from intrusion."

Meanwhile Job, with eyes that seemed much bigger than usual, made his way out to the mouth of the cave.

"I begin to understand what I'm to do," mused the little fellow. "I'm only to run away from the enemy, but that is in order to make them dread attack by a larger force. To escape that, and to make sure of their great prize, the Tai-pings will lose no time in getting the idol safely within the walls of their impregnable city. But what do Phil and Ralph expect to do?"

That was almost too great a puzzle for the wise boy. He concluded to give it up, and attend closely to his own orders.

Phil and Ralph, meanwhile, were in utter darkness. It seemed an age before the sound of distant firing came to them.

"Job has opened the ball," quivered Ralph.

"He's running away by this time, then," was Phil's confident rejoinder.

Nor was it many minutes before the cave was filled by a babel of voices.

Then came a hush, followed by a sound as of a multitude of pagan worshippers flopping to their knees.

Next rose the voice of a priest, chanting a prayer to Buddha.

For five minutes this form of a service lasted.

Then once more the babel arose.

Men bustled about. Orders were shouted. Ropes and chains were made fast to the idol.

Before half an hour was up, Buddha was in motion.

Moving on heavy rollers, the idol was manœuvred slowly out of the cave.

Here another hour was consumed in raising the idol to a secure position on trucks.

Yet the great bronze figure was hardly jarred. The two Americans hidden inside did not have half as rough a time as they had expected.

"These fellows are real workmen," whispered Phil, with his lips against one of Ralph's ears. "There's nothing slow in their make-up!"

With a creaking of wheels the trucks started off.

"Divine Buddha" lay on his back, staring straight up at the sky.

Phil and Ralph were standing, now, on the door. In the seemingly closed mouth of the figure were three tiny holes through which rays of light came into their hiding place.

Yet the concealed ones, seeing nothing but the tiniest patches of sky, were unable to know what was going on around them.

Yet, more than once, they heard voices in the procession around the idol pronounce the two syllables, "Kan Sing."

"We're headed right," declared Phil, confidently.

"And Bruce is doing his share, you may be sure," rejoined Ralph. "Beyond a doubt his field glasses are at this moment turned upon this great old aggregation of junk."

They did not converse much, however, for there was danger of their voices being heard.

So slowly did the trucks move that it was hours before they felt the idol tilt backward. This told them that they were being hauled up a hill, doubtless along the very road that led to the fortified city.

Two hours more were consumed by the ascent. Then, by the different noises

about them, the boys knew that the idol had been carried in triumph through the city's gates.

With marvelous skill and surprising speed these Tai-ping workmen toiled.

Great chains were made fast about the idol. With much creaking of derricks, Buddha began to rise.

For some time this motion continued, amid the shouts of a multitude of watchers.

"If they should drop it!" whispered Ralph, in his comrade's ear.

"They won't," predicted Phil. "That would bring them such bad luck, according to their way of thinking, that you may be sure the idol—and incidentally ourselves, will be handled with the greatest gentleness."

CHAPTER VI.

FOES TO FRONT AND REAR.

He was right. The motion ceased with such gentleness that only the dying out of the creaking noises told the boys that Buddha was again at rest.

Only for a few minutes, however, for gradually the huge bronze head left the floor, giving the boys much difficulty in getting new footings as the idol changed from a horizontal to an upright position.

It was near the end of the day. Standing with their eyes against the tiny holes in the idol's graven mouth, the Americans found themselves dazzled by the rays of the setting sun.

For this reason they did not see much.

It was soon dark, but a new series of sounds filled the air. There was a clattering of lumber, the sounds of hammering and sawing, and, above all, the shouts of men who were directing some new work.

This kept up for hours, a feeble glow of artificial light coming in through the only apertures.

Phil and Ralph whispered little to each other. There was not much to be said, since they could not hope to begin the work they had planned to attempt until the still watches of the night came, when the city of Kan Sing should be plunged in sleep.

Soon after the last hammering ceased chanting voices arose around the idol.

"Dedication service," whispered Phil.

"How sold these pagan priests will feel when they find out the shabby trick that their idol has played them!"

"If——!" interposed Ralph, significantly.

The chanting died out. All was still, save for an occasional low-spoken word as a few priests moved about, probably performing the last offices of the night.

"In an hour more," began Ralph, trembling with eagerness, "we shall——"

"Hush!" warned Phil, as, at that moment, something thudded gently against the back of the idol near where they were standing.

A ladder that something must have been, for in a moment a voice on the same level as the boy's heads called down:

"The entrance in the back will not open."

"Probably it has rusted," answered a voice from below. "Never mind, to-night. To-morrow will be soon enough for us to open the little door."

"It will be plenty soon enough to suit us," chuckled Phil, inwardly.

"Come down," added the voice from the floor, and it was only a few seconds later that the listeners heard the ladder being lifted away.

Five minutes later all was quite still. Even the city noises had died out.

"The time has come," whispered Ralph.

"Not for half an hour yet," negatived the leader, decisively. "Perhaps not then. It would be fatal to make a mistake."

"How shall we guess the passage of time in here?" asked the Maryland boy.

"We won't."

Glow! As the match he had struck flared up, Phil looked at his watch.

"Half-past ten," he murmured. "At eleven it will be late enough to take a try at our night's work."

Several more matches were burned before the watch's hand showed that the chosen minute had arrived.

"Let me peep out first," whispered Phil, fumbling for the bolt. "Remember that a sound may be enough to undo us."

Sque-eak! The bronze door in the idol's back made an alarming sound on its rusty hinges.

"I don't like that," grimaced Phil.

"Give it a quick push," advised Ralph. "It won't make any more noise, and we'll be out of suspense sooner."

Following the suggestion, Phil swung the door wide open.

As he did so, he took a swift survey of the vicinity.

Light came from half a dozen candles in paper lanterns.

Below, some fifteen feet, was the floor.

Overhead were the rafters of a severely plain temple.

"They built this to-night. That was the hammering we heard," asserted Phil.

"Rapid people these, then," commented Ralph. "No one in sight?"

"Not a soul."

"Now's our time, then."

"Rope made fast?"

"Certainly."

"Then throw the other end down, but gently."

"Want the coolie clothes?"

"I don't think we'll need them."

Firmly grasping the rope, Phil swiftly lowered himself to the floor.

Touching, he looked quickly all about him.

"Temple's deserted," he whispered up to Ralph.

"Look out for the rope, then."

Detached, down it came.

"Look out for me, now," added Ralph.

Calculating the distance nicely, the Maryland boy dropped, his cousin catching him under the arm-pits so that his feet made hardly a sound in striking against the floor.

"Now, we've got quick, furious work on hand," trembled Phil. "First to find our way from here to the main gate, and to do it without being detected."

"Four doors—one on each side of the temple," put in Ralph, looking about.

"We'll see what the outlook is from each," returned his cousin.

Side by side, they stole to the nearest door.

"It's pitch-dark outside—not even a star out," discovered the leader.

Getting down upon his hands and knees, Phil crept out through the doorway. Ralph followed.

"Stone-work outside, as well as in the temple," whispered Phil.

Something black and huge loomed up before them.

Instinctively both boys drew back.

But the object remained immovable. As his eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, Phil gave a sudden start.

"See what it is now, old fellow?" he whispered.

"Yes; a cannon."

"A heavy defense gun. At that rate we——"

Phil did not finish, but his cousin understood. Both thrilled with a sudden hope.

Veering off at right angles with their former course, they crept along.

Both drew up at the same time. A black abyss yawned before them.

"Glorious!" thrilled Phil.

"We're on top of the outer wall of the city!" quivered Ralph.

"Now if we can only communicate with Bruce!"

"He was to be near the main gate at this time."

"Wonder how far we are from that point ourselves?"

"Phil, if you'll go back into the temple, get the rope and bring it here, I'll put in the time reconnoitering to find out our exact position."

"Good, old chap! I'll get the rope, and meet you here."

"Be careful."

"Be careful yourself. Remember that you can't go far without running into a sentinel."

"If I do——" Ralph retorted, ominously.

"Don't do anything rash. A scuffle in the dark—a sudden noise—and our glorious plan would be ruined."

"I'll be as quiet as a mouse," promised Ralph Stirling.

Phil crept back over the parapet to the same door which he had used in leaving.

Gliding quickly through the door, for he feared that even the faint light might reveal his prowling figure to some watchful sentinel—he ran over to pick up the rope.

As he did so, another figure entered by one of the other doors.

The newcomer halted only long enough to give a gasp of surprise at this unex-

pected sight of a "foreign devil" in the sacred precincts of the temple.

Noiselessly as a cat this second comer moved across the stone floor.

Phil bent over, gathered up the rope, started to straighten his back.

As he did so, he came near crying out in his amazement.

Opposite him, hardly arm's length away, stood a powerful-looking Chinaman in the garb of a priest of Buddha.

All the wrath of an outraged priest, all the Chinaman's malignant hatred of "foreign devils," were depicted in that furious yellow face.

Like a flash, Phil Stirling dropped the coil of rope.

In the very next second he sprang at the Chinaman's throat.

They grappled, clinched.

At first Phil had decidedly the better of it.

"If you make a sound," he grated in the yellow man's ear, "I'll slay you!"

"You are not able," jeered the other, in a low tone. "Fool, you cannot draw your weapons, while divine Buddha gives me the strength to slay ten such as you!"

As if to prove his vaunting, the priest began to exert his superb strength.

In a contest of iron muscle, Phil Stirling was no match for his adversary.

Though Phil gripped for his throat, the Chinaman shook himself free of the strangling clutch.

At the same door through which this priest had come the face of another appeared for an instant.

Gliding away, he was back in a few moments armed with a curious but deadly weapon.

It consisted of a long, stout bamboo shaft, terminating in a crook of steel. It was the inner edge of this curve of steel that was sharpened—sharpened with the keenness of a razor's blade.

A fearful weapon, this, in the hands of a powerful man!

Toward the silent, struggling pair glided the second priest.

He poised his weapon over Stirling's head, prepared to bring the edge down and against his throat.

Seeing his colleague, the priest with whom our hero fought struck back his adversary's head.

What had become of Ralph?

Phil could not guess, but he knew that without quick help he must soon be vanquished.

Yet, full of grit, he grappled with his adversary, ignorant of danger from behind.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ALARM.

That was the scene that Ralph saw, flashing in at one of the doors.

Swift as thought he drew his revolver.

But Phil caught the glint of curved steel before his face.

Ducking, he wrenched himself free of the other priest.

Swing! His sabre was out.

Now Phil was the trooper, cool, practiced, intrepid.

His sabre, with the slightest blow, yet one full of skill, dashed aside the staff.

Now the other priest, from whom he had just freed himself, drew a knife.

Phil smiled disdainfully. With his own true piece of steel it would take him but an instant to dispose of both adversaries.

They sprang at him with the fury of tigers, but Stirling, swinging his sabre through the movements of one of his own favorite drills, kept them at bay with ease.

It was at that instant that our hero caught sight of Ralph.

His assailants, busy with their efforts to get at him, had not perceived this other foe.

Behind them Ralph glided forward to get the rope that lay at the base of the idol's pedestal.

There was a noose at one end of the line.

As Ralph picked it up, Phil, though he gave no sign, understood what was passing in the Maryland boy's mind.

Phil now began to advance, step by step.

Furiously the pair of Chinese priests fought against giving way, but Phil's sword, flaming in the reflected light, drove them before him as he moved onward.

With step as stealthy as a cat's Ralph approached them, swinging the noose.

Swish! swash! With passes so rapid that they seemed like swift flashes of

lightning, Stirling passed his sabre by the right side of one priest's head, by the left side of the other's.

Dodging, the menaced men brought their heads together with a bump.

Swirl! Ralph threw the noose over both touching heads.

Yank! He jerked the line back so suddenly as to pull both Mongols off their feet.

They landed upon the floor, pawing, scrambling, sputtering, for the still taut noose shut off their breath.

"Hold 'em!" chuckled Phil.

With a bound he was upon one of the choking Chinamen, stuffing a gag into his mouth.

"Put your hands together behind your back, if you value your life," muttered Phil sternly.

The priest addressed obeyed. Snap! Phil had a noose of cord tight around both wrists in a jiffy, nor was it many seconds before half a dozen more secure knots had been tied.

Under the same threats, the remaining Chinaman submitted.

While Phil was tying their feet, Ralph loosed the noose which had done such splendid service.

"What shall we do with them?" quivered Ralph.

"Drag them over into that corner," suggested Phil. "It looks like the most secure place, since the light is faint there, and they're not so likely to be espied from outside."

Each drew one of the fuming captives over by his shoulders.

Side by side the pair of pagan priests were laid upon their backs on the floors.

Gliding over by the idol, the boys halted to regard their foes attentively.

"They won't get free very soon," predicted Phil.

"One of them is fumbling with his hands," muttered Ralph.

"Let him. I tied them, and I know how much trouble he'll find in getting free."

Yet, no sooner had Phil Stirling spoken than he gave a gasp of dismay.

For the stone on which the priests lay moved suddenly.

Before the boys could comprehend what was happening—ere they could stir

from the spot where they stood, enthralled, dismayed spectators—the moving stone dropped both captives through the floor.

Click! Back into place snapped the big slab, baffling the boys at the very instant that they bounded to the spot.

Phil gasped. Ralph rubbed his eyes incredulously.

"Gone!"

"Vamoosed!"

"Slick!" muttered Phil.

"We must get at them."

"Easy to say; you can't do it."

"We must investigate; we must get hold of them again," cried Ralph, going down on his knees to study the movable portion of the floor.

"Well?" demanded Phil, standing over his cousin.

"I can't find a trace of that wonderful mechanism," groaned the Maryland lad.

"There's no time to try," uttered Phil, sharply. "We shall not see them again. They have simply dropped into a priestly hiding place where they are safe."

"But they may be able to free themselves—to give the alarm."

"For that very reason," palpitated Phil, "we must communicate at once with Bruce."

"By firing a shot?"

"That would destroy our last chance of success," quivered Phil. "One of us must reach the ground outside the walls—travel like lightning in search of Bruce. Depend upon it, he and the others are on the watch for us."

"I'll go," volunteered Ralph.

"All right. You must descend by the rope. I'll stand guard at the top on the parapet."

"We can fasten the rope to the carriage of that near-by gun," proposed Ralph.

By this time they had picked up the rope and gained the door nearest the gun.

Trembling, for it seemed a miracle that they had not already been seen by a sentinel, they glided outside.

In a few quick moves, Phil had one end made fast to the gun-carriage.

Carrying the coil to the outward edge of the parapet, Ralph began to lower it noiselessly, cautiously.

Before he had finished, his cousin stood at his side.

"If there's any alarm," whispered the latter, "there'll be a hot old fight up here. Depend upon me to defend this end of the rope while life lasts."

"I haven't a doubt that you will," voiced Ralph, earnestly.

"You won't need any pistols down there. Let me have them. I may need them."

Silently the Maryland boy made the transfer of his weapons to the leader's belt.

"Now, all haste," urged Phil. "Every second is precious."

Kneeling down at the edge of the parapet, Ralph seized the rope.

As he did so, there came a gentle pull from below.

Like a flash, Ralph gave an upward yank.

Three answering pulls, gentle and quick, answered.

Filled with surprise, both boys stood there, peering down.

It was useless to look. In the intense darkness, they could not make out the ground, sixty or seventy feet below.

But the rope vibrated regularly now.

Resting one hand upon it, Phil whispered:

"Some one is coming up."

Coming, surely, for it was not many seconds before a head looked up, followed by a pair of shoulders.

Climbing like a monkey, the fellow on the rope speedily shot up into view.

"Job!" voiced Phil, delightedly.

Gaining his feet on the top of the parapet, Jinks straightened up, sending his right hand to his helmet in a smart salute.

"H-h-h-h-h-here, mum—mum—mum—major!"

Still the rope trembled. Before Job had fairly reported, a larger head, a broader pair of shoulders came into view.

It was Jupe who next arrived by the air line.

Behind him came Lieutenant Wing.

"Where is Bruce?" whispered Phil.

"Him and Arrish is waiting back dar," responded Jupe, pointing into the blackness. "Dey's jess a-waiting fo' an ordah or a signal. We was done sent along de wall, Marse Phil, to see ef we'se could done find out whar yo' was."

"Then we are near the big gate?"

"Within t-t-t-t-two hundred yards of it," replied Job, eagerly.

Behind Wing others were coming. There were six of the yellow privates by the time that they stopped arriving.

"Famous!" chuckled Phil. "Now we have fellows enough to assure us of a breathing spell if we need it. Hing," to one of the soldiers, "go down the rope again, tell Captain Bruce to move his men silently toward the gate—to be prepared to rush in as soon as we can get the gate open."

Saluting, Hing went over the edge of the wall, down into the darkness below.

In absolute silence the rest waited, Phil blessing the darkness that made it possible for them to stand there unobserved, though they could not doubt that there were sentinels at no great distance.

"Some one's coming up," whispered Job, nudging Phil's elbow.

With bated breath they listened, waited.

As soon as a yellow head came vaguely into sight, both Phil and Ralph reached down, grasping the arrival by his shoulders.

"All same saw Cap'n Bruce," reported Private Hing, saluting as soon as he could get upon his feet.

"You gave him my order?"

"Yep, major."

"He will be at the gate?"

"You allee same hear him?" grinned Hing.

Phil listened, but no sound reached his ears.

"Cap'n Bluce all same moving whole battalion," assured Hing. "Have him feet of horses all same tied up in cotton cloth, so they no makee noise. Cap'n Bluce, him say he be there as soon as you allee same need him."

"Keep at my rear, all hands. Move without noise," whispered Phil to the little group around him.

He took two steps forward, then halted.

Hardly a hundred yards away steps were audible, accompanied by the rattle of arms.

"Something will break in a moment," gritted Phil. "Here comes the Tai-ping patrol."

"Shall we fire on them?" whispered Ralph.

"Not unless they do. We may be passed by in this blackness."

Vain hope!

Not more than eighty feet away from where the little group stood the patrol halted.

"Who is there?" hailed a voice.

There was no sound or move from Phil's men.

There was a flash, a report from a Tai-ping gun.

The first shot had been fired.

Third Part.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEVEN AGAINST A MULTITUDE.

The ball whizzed over their heads.

It is only an extraordinary marksman who can shoot well in the dark.

Like statues Phil's men waited for the order to fire.

It did not come. Instead he muttered, briskly:

"Forward!"

Dismayed, the patrol fell back.

"They are between us and the gate," cried Job.

"At them!" commanded Phil, swinging his own sabre aloft.

But the Tai-pings did not wait to meet them.

Amazed, doubtless believing the enemy to be in much greater force than was the case, the yellow rebels fell back, firing two shots into the air as they ran.

Zim! zim! sounded a gong, sharply.

Other gongs answered.

Satisfied with having given the alarm, the patrol fled without stopping.

They were closely pursued by Phil's small squad.

The big arch of the main gate now loomed dimly up, close at hand.

At the same time, the bodies of the patrol began to vanish.

"A stairway!" thrilled Phil.

He halted an instant as he reached the head of a long flight of steps that led from the parapet down to the square just inside the gate.

Clang! sounded an enormous bell.

From other points there came answering peals.

All Kan Sing must be by this time aroused!

For a second, Phil hesitated. Had he the right to lead his comrades and men down into almost certain death?

Pulling his helmet tightly down over his brow, he wheeled about.

"Only those fellows who choose to," he cried. "The rest may seek safety down the rope."

Down the stairs he went, two at a time. There was tumult in Kan Sing.

Gongs were clashing, bells tolling, alarm shots being fired; over all came the hoarse commands of Tai-ping officers aroused from their sleep and rushing to the fray.

Yet not one of those behind Phil Stirling hesitated, nor was any longing glance thrown behind.

Eleven strong, they reached the ground.

There were abundant foes waiting to receive them.

From the gate fifty Tai-ping soldiers poured upon them, coming forward in a compact mass.

Still Phil had not given the order to fire. His men behaved with admirable discipline.

Suddenly Stirling's firm tones rang out.

"V-formation! To the right and left! Charge!"

It was the manoeuvre that had made him famous in China.

Placing himself at the apex of this flying military wedge, the young major led his men into the thick of the fight.

Sabres flashing, carbines trailing, Phil's seemingly forlorn hope struck into the Tai-pings.

Clashing steel rang out. Taken by surprise, caught at close quarters, the yellow rebels had no time to use their fire-arms upon the invaders.

It was give-and-take, but the Tai-pings, inferior to the imperial troopers in swordmanship, did most of the taking.

Slowly but surely the rebel ranks were broken. The imperial soldiers got through them, between them and the gate.

Yet the cost was dear.

For four of Phil's yellow soldiers lay

upon the ground, leaving but seven men up all told.

Had so few foes beaten them? the Tai-pings wondered.

With a yell of rage they turned to come back to the combat.

"About face!" shouted the young major. "Ready! aim low! fire!" As the seven carbines rang out the rebels paused.

Only the fusillade that instantly followed from revolvers was needed to drive them back in confusion.

There was an instant's breathing spell for the few invaders.

Under the arch of the gate-way stood a building of stone. Through its roof ran several ponderous chains.

"The gate-house!" cried Phil. "We've half a minute to raise the gate!"

Into the building swarmed the seven every man of whom knew that life itself depended upon their speed!

Two lanterns burned inside, showing the crude, ponderous mechanism that controlled the gate.

In the middle of the room was a huge windlass, with a ponderous iron crank eight feet long.

It required ordinarily, twelve muscular men to work the windlass.

"Get hold wherever you can!" shouted Phil. "Turn!"

Before the chains even creaked, there came a tumultuous yell from the city outside.

"No!" countermanded Phil. "We've got to turn and fight. Here they come in force!"

It was true. All of the narrow streets that led through the city to the gate were alive with torches.

Everywhere hurrying squads of men could be seen.

"We've got a hundred at least to fight!" palpitated Phil. "Be ready to fire, but don't do it until you get the order."

"Marse Phil," cried Jupe, excitedly. "Marse Phil, yo' jess gib me two men to he'p me, and I'se done see ef I'se kain't get dat gate up. De rest ob yo' can do the fighting."

"Can you do it, Jupe?" blazed Phil.

"Why, I ain't jess 'zactly shuah, but yo' always tole me I was strong as any fo' men yo' eber seen."

"Try it, Jupe," Phil decided quickly.

With a yell, Jup darted back to the windlass, calling as he sprang to the two privates.

Phil, Ralph, Job and Ah Wing planted themselves at the door and one window.

"Fellows!" cried Phil, huskily. "Comrades, upon our shooting depends how many seconds we may have left to live."

Jupe had thrown off his coat. His powerful muscles standing out like knots under the black skin in his shoulders and neck, he tried to give the handle the first turn.

His two yellow men threw in the weight of their strength.

"She's a-turning!" roared Jupe.

"Cre-eak! But though the chains did move an inch or so, the strain was too great upon the trio at the handle.

There was a groan from Jupe as the handle slipped back, cheating him of even the inch of advantage he had gained.

"Fire!" thundered Phil.

So terrific was the din all over the alarmed city that those who stood around him were just able to hear his order.

Not a sound of a report reached the Tai-ping soldiers hastening down the narrow streets to the gate.

But they saw the flashes—knew what it meant when they stumbled over the prostrate bodies of those who had been in the lead.

"Tu'n, boys, tu'n wid a will!" bel-lowed Jupe.

The gate was up two inches, now, but those who stood at the windlass handle felt that they were straining themselves to the point of collapse.

Outside came a chorus of impatient yells from Bruce and the waiting battalion.

Crack! crack!-crack!

While the trio at the windlass toiled until their strained muscles threatened to snap, their four defenders blazed away incessantly.

Nor were the Tai-pings either idle or hesitating.

Though men were dropping every moment, they pressed on, firing as they came.

Zip! ping! chud! rang the patter of bullets on the stone walls of the building.

Turning, Phil slashed down the two lanterns that hung in the room, leaving

the enemy little guide for their aim except the vivid flashes at the muzzles of four men's weapons.

The bottom of the gate was now some four inches clear of the ground.

Oh, it was tantalizing to fight thus hand-to-hand with sure death when nearly two hundred comrades waited only the raising of the gate to rush to their aid!

No more could gain the parapet by the rope. That had been cut by the rallying sentinels on the walls high above.

"Up with the gate—quicker!" came in Bruce's stentorian tones.

It was like mockery. Jupe and his two men strained until it seemed as though their veins would burst, yet they could gain hardly an inch a minute.

Reinforced, shoved on by the increasing masses of soldiery behind, the Tai-pings were pushing forward in spite of the deadly storm of lead that cut their foremost men down.

Thronging out of the narrow streets into the square, the yellow rebels raced forward.

It was no longer possible even to delay them with bullets.

Whipping out his sabre, Phil darted through the door.

"In a minute more—the Long Furlough!" he shouted, desperately.

Through the door after him sprang Ralph and Job.

Leaping through the window, Ah Wing came to their side.

Only a barrier of steel—four sabres wielded by stout but not unconquerable arms—now opposed the rush of hundreds of Tai-pings.

"Do your best, Jupe!" thundered Phil. "We can hold them off for thirty seconds!"

But back came the darky's voice, roaring like a fog-horn despite the awful strain upon all his muscles:

"De gate's up a foot, Marse Phil. I'se done breakin' mah back, but de blame gate am done stuck!"

As if they realized to the full the predicament of their handful of foes, the Tai-pings raised a yell of victory.

They closed in upon the quartette, attacking them upon three sides, hacking, slashing, bent on an instant's conquest.

CHAPTER IX.

LOOKING DEFEAT IN THE FACE.

Sorely pressed as Phil and his comrades were, Jupe's fearful task called for no less heroism.

While the four swordsmen were making a splendid resistance, each keeping the blades of five or six foes in play, Jupe was near to dying of hard work if ever man was.

Somehow, he and the two Chinamen got the ponderous gate up a second foot.

"Hurrah!" came Bruce's ringing cheer.

Crawling in under the bottom of the gate, the lanky youth raced forward to where his comrades were making the stand of their lives.

Clash! Bruce's sabre rang against a ponderous two-handed sword just in time to save Phil Stirling's head.

Lieutenant Kong and a dozen more Chinamen reinforced them.

Jupe, catching sight of the men who were crawling in under the gate, sang out for help.

A score of the yellow men answered his summons.

Ah! The strain was over. Under the impulse of as many hands as could grasp the long handles, the gate went creaking up.

There was a wild cheer as a hundred and fifty troopers rode in through the gateway.

Dismay sounded in the voices of the Tai-pings, for they imagined this brave array to be but the vanguard of an imperial army.

Now the four original defenders, sorely winded, fell back, leaving the work to be done by fresher arms.

At the height of the melee, Phil and his brother officers found their own led horses and mounted.

Yet the Tai-pings, though taken by surprise at the instant of their expected victory, did not fall back.

Clear notes of a bugle rang out as Phil rode up to one of his yellow trumpeters.

With splendid discipline the battalion formed at the trumpeted command.

Ta-ra-ta-ta-ta! Forward rode the troopers, headed by their own loved major.

There was a wild, sharp thunder of musketry, a very babel of yells, the sharp clack of horses' hoofs over the pavement as the imperial soldiers rode into the charge.

After a few minutes of all but paralyzed resistance, the Tai-pings gave way.

Leaving Bruce's Troop B behind to defend the gate and hold it at all hazards, Phil, riding by the side of Ralph, urged Troop A after the fugitives.

For some three hundred yards down the broadest street the pursuit was kept up.

Then the tide of battle turned.

The enemy had received heavy reinforcements from all parts of the city.

Fighting doggedly over every inch of the ground, Phil found himself forced back.

Backing their horses, fighting as they retreated, the yellow troopers found themselves forced back into the square.

Now Bruce, with a ringing hurrah, rode forward to get a share of the night's rough work.

Crack! crack! crack! came a rattling volley from the top of the parapet.

Up there a considerable force of men had gathered.

They were firing down upon the imperialists at close range, and with such good effect that saddles were swiftly emptied.

Seeing the foe at the front retreat once more up the streets, Phil turned to study this new menace at the rear.

True, his rearmost men were firing up at the parapet, but they were getting decidedly the worst of it.

Riding up to Bruce, Phil called out:

"Captain, if that fire from above keeps on, it means swift extermination for us. There is the stairway that leads to the top of the wall. Can you take the parapet, and drive back those rascals who are slaughtering our men like sheep?"

"Can I?" roared the lanky captain, straightening up as he saluted. "I'll do it, or—good-by!"

Like a rocket, Bruce was off.

Calling to fifty of his men to dismount, he led them toward the long stairway.

Not slow to understand the importance of this move, the Tai-pings above ceased firing, running to the head of the stairs to prepare for resistance.

Up raced gallant Bruce, closely followed by his half a troop.

Meanwhile Phil discovered by the enemy's torches—for the foolish Tai-pings would not fight in the dark—that his foes were massing for another onslaught upon the new masters of the gate.

"Captain," cried Phil, riding over to his cousin, "form your men and lead them forward once more. Fall back, when necessary."

Ralph's sabre flashed upward in salute. A moment later he was off at the head of his men.

Phil dallied long enough to give a few brisk orders to Job Jinks.

Then the young major spurred after his cousin, galloped by the flanks, and took up his post of danger on Ralph's right hand.

Less than two hundred yards from the beginning of the street they rode squarely against the foe.

They fought, now, at almost too close quarters to swing their sabres.

While they could, the foremost troopers emptied their revolvers and carbines into the rebels.

But the instant their firearms were emptied they went back to cold steel, which soon became hot steel, dripping with the warm blood of men well-nigh as brave as themselves.

The enemy were solidly massed. In twenty minutes of desperate fighting, the imperial troops gained a bare hundred and fifty yards.

Nor did Phil dare advance too far.

Every soldier in the city was now under arms.

Should he go past one of the intersecting streets, there was grave danger that he would find himself cut off from the square, and hemmed in at the rear as well as in front.

All the while, Phil eagerly listened.

At last the summons came for which he had waited.

As a bugle's notes came to him faintly over the din he passed the command to Ralph to once more retreat with the face to the enemy.

In this fashion, they gained the square. Here the survivors of the troop wheeled completely around, making a dash for the gate.

A low wall of earth confronted them.

While they had been fighting, Job, with some two-score of men had thrown up a line of earthworks.

Over this the troopers rode, then, at a swift command from Captain Ralph they dismounted, threw themselves against the redoubt and poured a deadly, close-range fusillade into their yelling pursuers.

Breaking under the slaughter, the yellow rebels fled toward the centre of the city.

During the next few minutes the only fighting was that done in the unequal battle being waged by Bruce's men at the head of the stairs leading to the parapet.

Phil made a quick survey of that elevated part of the theatre of operations.

Though Bruce had not yet won—indeed, he seemed far from it—it was apparent that reinforcements would not aid him, for he already had as great a force as he could manœuvre.

But now the next move came from cityward.

Whoever was directing the night fight of the enemy had come to a wise conclusion.

He would no longer pit infantry against the terrible horsemen commanded by the "foreign devils."

Instead, he now sent his cavalry, eight hundred strong, to the front.

On came the mounted Tai-pings, thundering through the four streets that emptied in the square.

They knew, did the officers commanding these rebel squadrons, of the redoubt at the square.

Yet, if the imperial soldiers could ride over the wall of earth, could they not hope to do the same?

Phil stood behind the centre of the redoubt, awaiting the attack with grim looks.

No sooner did the Tai-ping riders dash into sight than he gave the order to open fire.

Deadly execution was done by the first volley, worse by the next, but it seemed as if nothing could check the headlong rush of the Tai-pings.

Enraged to find themselves defied by so few, they were now bent upon extermin-

nating the invaders, at no matter what cost of life.

Though a hundred fell, seven hundred remained in saddle.

Straight up to the redoubt they rode, urging their horses to scramble over.

But every beast in the foremost ranks came to a quivering, snorting halt.

From the redoubt protruded a frieze of spears, a long, glittering line, planted so close together that it was not possible to drive a horse between any two of them.

They were set, too, just at that height which presented the steel points at the horses' breasts.

"By file, fire!" roared Major Phil Stirling.

Along the redoubt swept a line of fire the volley emptying into the halted foe with a deadliness that could not be resisted.

Like dry leaves before the wind the enemy were swept away, fleeing once more on that memorable night before few but splendidly-officered imperial troopers.

And now a youth breathless but triumphant rode to Phil's side.

"Ph-Phil," stuttered Job, "w-w-w-w-was that what you w-w-w-w-wanted?"

"A noble idea, my friend," rejoined Stirling. "You carried it out better than I planned. The spears of the dead Taipings did even better work than the carbines of my live men."

Job saluted and rode off happy. While Phil had ordered the building of the redoubt, it was Jinks to whom the wrinkle had occurred of collecting the spears of the enemy's dead in the vicinity to make the redoubt impassable to the Tai-ping cavalry.

Though the din and tumult still continued, Phil quickly noted the absence of one element of noise.

"By Jove," he muttered, glancing suddenly up at the parapet, "the racket there appears to have stopped. Can Bruce have——"

But a man, breathless and hatless, dashed down the stairs.

It was Kong, Bruce's yellow second lieutenant.

"Cap'n Bruce, him do what him say him do," announced the panting messenger.

He was so excited that he forgot his customary salute.

"He has captured the parapet?" Phil demanded.

"Yep."

"Noble old Bruce!"

"But Cap'n Bruce allee same lose plenty soldier," augmented the lieutenant.

"I'm afraid so," sighed Phil. "This has been a bloody night's work! If there were time, I'd send a courier to Ki-yo for a few regiments of his droning army. But the fate of this battle will be decided by an hour after daylight."

"You tell me," cried Kong, "I lide likee lightning to Ki-yo."

The yellow lieutenant, proud of the commission he had won, would have been equal, exhausted as he was, to winning fresh honors by reaching Ki-yo's camp in a gallop.

But Phil, though half tempted to send the fellow, shook his head, for it would require the better part of a dozen hours to get the slow old yellow Napoleon's forces to Kan Sing.

Wondering what would be the final outcome of this rashest venture of his life, Phil hastily dismounted.

Knowing that Ralph was equal to holding the redoubt as long as it could be held, the young major climbed the stairs to see what Bruce was doing, or could do.

"I'm afraid," admitted Phil to himself, "that we've taken too big a bite out of the loaf of fame."

Yet no trace of his doubt lingered in his face as he reached the top of the parapet.

He was in every inch the calm, confident, self-reliant soldier as he faced flushed, triumphant Captain Bruce!

CHAPTER X.

DESPERATION.

"Major," reported Troop B's commander, "we hold the parapet."

"This part of it," rejoined Phil. "And the square below. But the enemy hold the rest of Kan Sing. How many guns have you captured?"

"Four."

"And ammunition?"

Bruce's face fell, as he reported:

"Major, there is but one round of powder for each gun, and but one solid shot for each."

"Then, if at daylight we open fire with these four guns——"

"We must take the city with four shots, or——take the consequences! The Tai-pings have fifty other guns with which they'll open fire upon us."

"Wrong," negatived Phil Stirling, decisively. "They will do nothing of the sort."

"They are blamed fools if they don't," muttered the puzzled Bruce. "They've got twelve guns to our one, and all the ammunition."

"Bruce, don't you understand why the Indian Buddha was raised to this parapet—why the temple was built over it?"

"Eh?" cried the lanky youth, the truth beginning to dawn upon him.

"No yellow pagan dares to fire upon a sacred temple," went on Phil. "Impregnable as Kan Sing was believed to be before, its governor took an added precaution when he placed this big idol so close to the main gate for fear the shot would go wild and strike the idol or temple."

"You're right," cried Bruce, enthusiastically. "And by that sign we win."

"Not so fast," remonstrated Phil. "On the contrary, we haven't more than one chance in a hundred.. The fighting has stopped because the Tai-pings don't relish battling in the dark. At daylight they will renew the fight. Dragging the cannon to the fore, they will open fire upon the square below. Either they will compel our men to retreat through the gate, or they will drive the last survivor of them up here. Then we must fight up here, seventy feet from the ground, against probably four thousand of the enemy. They will gain the parapet from other parts of the city, and march around here to attack us from two sides at once. And we have lost many of our men to-night. The survivors are all fagged out."

"A gloomy picture," muttered Bruce, moodily. "What are you going to do?"

"Fight," came the laconic answer. "After having gone so far, we'll either take Kan Sing or die here to the last man."

"That has the right ring," cried Bruce, seizing his commander's hand.

"Now," spoke up Phil, "its time to load the guns. Load two of them with solid shot. "The others I want you to load as full as they'll stand with——"

"Grape?" hinted Bruce.

"Yes. Use all the bullets you can spare, all the brass buttons you can gather up, any scrapes of metal you can find—break up cobble stones if you can't get grape enough without."

Saluting, Bruce strode off. It was not long before two of the big cannon were so loaded, and pointed so as to guard the approaches from the city to the square below.

The other two cannon, loaded with solid shot, were held in reserve.

There were no more attacks during the night, but the sounds of bustle throughout Kan Sing told of extensive preparations for battle as soon as the light should come.

When day broke over the city, the American officers were grouped in grave consultation on the parapet.

Their glasses swept every visible part of Kan Sing. Phil's conjectures proved to be more than realized.

Every Tai-ping soldier in the city was under arms. There were fully four thousand of them. Forming in several contiguous streets half a mile away, the enemy's regiments marched and countermarched, reaching the positions assigned to them by their commander.

"Confound the rascals," muttered Phil, suddenly. "They've struck a scheme, now, that will save their fighting strength to the last moment. They're driving non-combatant coolies to the front of their columns. They're going to force us to waste a lot of ammunition and fighting strength in attacking the coolies, before we come face to face with their real fighting men!"

"Its a shrewd move" muttered Bruce, uneasily.

"For a commander who has no appreciation of the rights of non-combatants to live," supplemented Ralph, savagely.

A pall had fallen swiftly over the spirits of the young officers. Their one chance of resistance was cut in two by this last keen move of the enemy.

Springing to the nearer of the cannon

loaded with grape, Bruce began to rapidly work the mechanism that controlled it.

"I can get a splendid sight on the regular troops, now," he reported, eagerly. "Shall I try a charge on them?"

Phil deliberated, anxiously, for a moment.

"No," he finally decided. "The charge of powder in the gun won't carry that small stuff so far with any effect. The piece was loaded with a view to close range work. It would be a waste of our resources to risk it."

But Claymore Bruce, gazing through the magnifying sight as he shifted the muzzle of the cannon from side to side, made a discovery.

"Look over there," he ejaculated, leaping to Phil's side, and pointing to a building two or three streets to the south of where the Tai-ping troops were massing.

Phil surveyed the building intently through his field-glasses.

"It's the city's magazine," he declared, with a quiver.

"If we only had it her," muttered Bruce. "Yet even where it is, it may be of good use to us. Suppose I drop a solid shot into it? Chances are almost even that it would explode the magazine. There wouldn't be twenty men left in the Tai-ping army if that establishment went up in smoke!"

"Nor here, either," commented Phil Stirling, grimly. "If that magazine is as well stocked as other Tai-ping magazines we have seen, the slaughter would be as great here as there."

"Do you notice the file of coolies coming out of the magazine," queried Ralph, who was also using his glass. "They are carrying fighting material over to the forming troops."

Phil seemed lost in a brown study. In a few moments he was out of it, his eyes flashing.

"Bruce," he demanded, in a husky, strained voice, "can you hold out here with what men you have on the parapet?"

Catching the spirit that animated his leader, the lanky youth fired back.

"There's no 'can' about it, sir! I will!"

"Ralph, Job, Tim, Jupe!" called Phil, hoarsely, bringing the others to him with bounds. "I want you to follow me—to

swift death, most likely, but its our one chance in a thousand!"

Like four rapid machines his fellow officers saluted.

In few but fiery, magnetic words, Stirling broached his daring plan.

"Lead on!" begged Ralph.

Without another word, Phil bounded down the stairs to the square below, his comrades following in a bunch.

Leaping upon his horse, Major Stirling held up his sabre.

Instantly a hush fell over the yellow troopers.

"My men," shouted the young leader, "I have tried to train you to go to death as you would to your beds."

An answering shout arose.

"Do you want to retreat—to give up what little we have already gained?"

Hoarse dissent responded.

"Will you follow me, unflinchingly, to swift, certain, horrible death, if need be?"

There was tumult among the troopers. They cheered and protested that they would follow him to annihilation.

And Major Phil Stirling, gazing over the now enthused, yellow faces, knew that they spoke the truth!

"Fall in!" he shouted. "By column of fours!"

At the peal of the bugle, the troop moved forward, one hundred and thirty strong.

A wide enough space in the redoubt had been cleared of spears for the horsemen to ride over it four abreast.

Phil took the central street ahead, a course that would bring him against the main body of Tai-pings.

At a brisk trot the column moved forward.

Observers from all parts of the city flashed the startling news to the Tai-ping commander.

The imperial troopers, led by the "foreign devils," were moving to attack the rebels where they stood.

It was a foolish, crazy step. The Tai-ping commander drew up his men to receive the attack.

He would soon, on the strict defensive, annihilate the handfuls of troopers riding against him.

It was a thrilling sight, but the young

major seemed leading his column against sure destruction.

Breathless with wonder, the Tai-pings stood silent. They had been ordered to hold their fire until the combatants were almost at arm's length.

Then——

But two streets below the waiting, expectant army, the cavalry bugle rang suddenly out.

The column veered, dashed down two side streets at once, disappearing in a few seconds.

A wild roar of rage went up from the Tai-pings as they discovered the trick.

For the enemy were headed for the all but unguarded magazine!

One after another the regiments were put in motion to the new scene of the battle.

But Phil and Ralph, heading their men at a gallop, reached the magazine two minutes ahead of the rebels.

As the apprehensive Tai-ping general rode up at the head of one of his own regiments, he found the troop in possession of the magazine, swarming the yard, his own handful of guards falling back upon the main body.

Out of the door of the magazine came Ralph Stirling, spilling a trail of powder as he ran. Just ahead of him was Phil Stirling, holding a flaming torch.

"Halt!" commanded Major Phil, holding up one hand with a menacing gesture, while with the other he held the torch within a few perilous inches of the powder trail.

Abruptly enough the Tai-pings paused, all but stampeding.

"Let your general come forward!" commanded Phil.

But there was no stir among the enemy.

"If he does not at once come forward to hear what I have to say," thundered Phil, "then Kan Sing shall be but a memory after the next instant. I swear that I will end to-day's battle by blowing up the city."

With cold perspiration dripping down his face, the Tai-ping commander rode slowly forward, pushed onward by his own men.

Resolute, thought trembling hardly less than the other commander, Stirling shouted:

"I give you sixty seconds to decide whether you will surrender the city and lay down your arms."

"I cannot!" came the husky answer.

"Then we must all perish!" flung back Stirling, holding the torch nearer the trail.

A tumult from the yellow rebels caused their general to swiftly change his mind.

"I surrender!" he called hoarsely.

"Very good!" roared back Phil. "But do not think that we are to be tricked. The mine leading to the magazine shall be watched, torch in hand, until General Ki-yo's troops arrive."

"I beg your excellency," appealed the Tai-ping leader, "to allow me to withdraw my men to another square, where they shall lay down their arms."

"Granted!" uttered Phil, concisely.

Like mist the rebels vanished from the vicinity of the magazine.

Fifteen minutes went by without sound.

"Go up to the top of the building," directed Phil, "and tell me, Ralph, if you can see what the enemy are doing."

Down came this report from the Maryland boy:

"On the opposite side of the city from the main gate, the Tai-pings are leaving Kan Sing."

"They have tricked us that much," grumbled Phil, mopping the perspiration from his forehead. "But let them leave!"

The soldiers had truly left. Within an hour thousands of the populace had fled after them.

It was eleven o'clock that morning when General Ki-yo received this laconic note:

"Tai-pings carried off the Indian Buddha to Kan Sing. We have the idol. We also possess Kan Sing. Send army of occupation at once."

"(Signed) Philip Stirling, Major."

And on that night imperial sentinels walked their posts on the parapets.

[THE END.]

Next week No. 15 of the Adventure Weekly will be issued. It will contain complete "Chung Kee's White Hostage; or, Phil Stirling's Bitter Ordeal." No more thrilling, absorbing, ingenious narrative was ever traced by the pen of Douglas Wells. Don't miss it!

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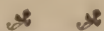
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3. The contest should be simple and interesting.
4. Suggestions are to be addressed to "Suggestion Contest,"

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STREET & SMITH, NEW YORK CITY.

This Contest Closes April 13, 1898.

Editorial Comment.

The rapid increase in the circulation of this publication gives positive proof that a series of stirring tales of adventure is in demand among the juvenile reading public. There are stories and stories, but for genuine human interest the dashing exploits of Phil Stirling and his gallant comrades are far in the lead. American boys should be proud of the hero who carried his flag into the heart of the Chinese Empire, for, be it understood, Phil Stirling is only another name for an actual soldier of fortune who is, at this writing, still living.

Among the many curious customs in vogue in China is the gambling for sweetmeats or preserved fruits. Many boys spend the most of their time in hawking these sweetmeats about the streets. Those who wish to procure them usually try their fortune at gambling for them in a peculiar way. The lad who carries the sweetmeats carries also with him a bamboo tube, six or eight inches long, and two or three inches in diameter, one end of which is closed with the natural joint.

Out of the other end protrude some twenty, more or less, of small splinters of bamboo. Near the end, resting on the bottom of the tube, and, of course, out of sight, are some notches or numberings. The one who ventures a coin for the preserves pulls out of the tube one or more of the slips according to the rules of the game. If the drawer is successful he receives fruits, etc., worth five times as much as the money he staked; if unsuccessful, he loses what he ventured to bet.

Correspondence.

X. X., Dubuque, Iowa.—Tracing paper can be made by washing very thin paper with a mixture of spirits of turpentine, six; resin, one; boiled nut oil, one, parts by weight, applied with a soft sponge.

Blue and Red, Philadelphia.—A person who can read and write the English, French and German languages can travel without difficulty in any part of Europe, Asia or Africa. The English and French languages are spoken in more countries than any other language.

Carey's Double, Oskaloosa, Iowa.—1. In the United States army the word "reveille" is pronounced rev-a-le. 2. Chamade, pronounced shamad in the army, is the sound of a drum or trumpet inviting an enemy to parley. 3. History does not state the cause of the death of the party you inquire about.

F. P., Chattanooga, Tenn.—1. The rabbit pest in Australia is on the decline, for the simple reason that they are killed systematically by organized bodies of men. They first fence in a large tract of land with an opening on one side. Then they start the dogs to hunt the rabbits into a corner, where a large body of men and boys club them to death. 2. You might receive the desired information by writing to the mayor of Brisbane (Queensland), Australia.

Among the Jayhawkers.

BY CHARLES DOUGLAS.

Many years since I took a fancy to travel beyond the region of railroads and steamboats, into one of the new territories of the Southwest. My object was to see what could be done on a large scale in the way of trade.

It was toward the close of a fine spring day that I rode up to the great barnlike tavern of one of those spread-out pine-board towns of the Far West, which grow up so rapidly in the path of emigration. A large group of rude-looking men stood on the steps and seemed to be carefully criticizing me and comparing notes as I dismounted. I was conscious of nothing peculiar about me, except the generally smart and "natty" appearance of myself and animal. The latter was a splendid roadster that I had purchased in St. Louis, in fine condition, and with an action that would excite the admiration of any horse fancier. I was habited in a new suit, surmounted by a slouched hat, and completed by great top boots. My saddle and bridle were half military in their shape and trimmings, and I had a valise and blanket roll strapped on behind. On the whole, I think almost any observer would have set me down for something more than a mere private citizen traveling on his own business.

I left my horse in care of the first man whom I found willing to take him, and ordering my supper, walked about the uninviting barroom, and finally took a seat and began to read a pamphlet that I had in my pocket. While I was thus engaged a great burly fellow came and stood in the doorway, and deliberately stared at me.

"Good-evening, sir," I said. "I should like to make a few inquiries, if you please, about the country, and——"

"Not of me, you won't," was his rude rejoinder, and he was gone before I could ask an explanation.

I was a little nettled at such boorishness, and still rather amused, than annoyed. I should probably have thought no more of it but for more of the same kind of treatment that I shortly experienced. A shock-headed girl called me out to supper, and finding a table abundantly spread with the substantials of life, I was appeasing my hunger vigorously, when a wild, wolfish face was thrust inside the door, and two staring eyes surveyed me closely.

"What's wanted?" I asked, rather irritated by the repetition of such an attention.

There was no answer; the head was withdrawn, and within the same minute I had the pleasure of seeing two more faces looking in upon me through one of the windows.

"What do these people mean?" I asked of the girl who waited on me.

She shook her head, but there was an expression on her face that informed me that she did know, and that she pitied me. I was beginning to feel decidedly uncomfortable; my appetite was spoiled before it was half appeased, and I resolved on the spot to continue my journey that night rather than remain in such an inhospitable place.

I rose from my chair and laid down three silver dollars on the table.

"That's for my supper and the horse's feed," I said to the girl, "and you may keep the rest yourself. Now, please tell them to bring the horse round right off, for I must be gone."

I shall never forget the look of pain and pity that was shown at that moment by the face of that rude, homely girl.

"They won't give you the horse," she said, shortly.

"Won't give me my own horse?" I echoed. "And why not, pray?"

"Hush!" she said, laying her hand firmly on my mouth. "Don't be making a noise. If they should think you suspected it, they'd do it now."

Now, although I had no idea of the full import of her startling words, yet there was a hideous suggestion in them that fairly made my flesh creep.

"For Heaven's sake, tell me what you mean," I said, faintly. "I can't account for the actions of these people. What do they mean, and what am I to do?"

"I hoped I should see no more bloodshed," the girl said, looking sadly and wearily into my face. Then she put her hand on my shoulder, and continued fiercely: "It's all your own fault. Why did you come here? Any fool in Jefferson could have told you what they'd do if you came here."

"What do they take me for?" I asked, a suspicion of the truth breaking upon me.

"For just what you are, of course," she said, coldly. "The marshal come to serve writs of arrest."

"They are mistaken; you are all mistaken," I protested. "I am not a marshal, nor an officer of any kind. I am merely a merchant, traveling on my own business."

She looked at first incredulous, but I continued to assure her of my real character, and she, seeing my sincerity, soon believed me.

"But you can't make them believe it," she quickly added. "The last marshal that was here was dressed and mounted just like you, and that question you asked Aleck Maxwell made 'em sure you're the same kind. The truth is," and she lowered her voice, "there's a great many horse thieves and cattle stealers in this county—the people are pretty much all up to it—and there's dozens of 'em sworn never to let an officer go out of the country alive."

"What did they do to the marshal you speak of?" I asked, with a cold shiver.

"Well, they just hung him to that big live oak across the road and buried him under it."

"Good Heaven! But I'm not a marshal; I wouldn't harm a man in the county if I could."

She shook her head.

"It's no use, stranger," she said. "They won't believe you; your looks belie everything you say. They'll serve you out the same way."

"Can't I escape?" I asked in a perfect agony of terror. "Get me my horse and let me go."

"It's no use; they'd kill me if I got your horse for you. Here!" She softly opened a door and pointed out. "It's a slim chance for life, but it's your only one. Take to the woods, and may Heaven have mercy on you! Don't stop to thank me—go!"

I waited for no second invitation, but cleared

the house, and plunged into the woods unobserved. I ran without stopping for sometime, and then unexpectedly found myself in the highway that I had traveled two hours before, with the village visible a mile away. The truth was, I had cut off a great corner of the woods in my flight; and the road turning, I had thus struck it.

It was now almost twilight, but a shout warned me that I was discovered, and the sound of furious galloping broke on my ear. I was too much exhausted to fly any farther, even if that could have done any good. I dropped down behind the trunk of a huge tree, and desperately awaited my fate. I had pistols with me, and I resolved that I would not be lynched without a struggle.

A dozen horsemen rode up to within a few yards of where I lay, and separating, rode hither and thither about the skirts of the wood. The hoof of one of the horses once brushed my leg, but I lay quiet and was not discovered, though I lay trembling. Soon the party gathered for consultation, and with plenty of curses on my devoted head, they agreed that I must have taken to the woods again, but that I could not be far off.

By common consent they dismounted, hitched their horses, and dividing into two parties, plunged into the wood on each side of the road. I waited with beating heart, until they had gone so far that I could not distinguish their voices, though I could see the flashing of the lanterns they had lighted, and then I stole forth from my concealment.

What was my surprise and delight to discover my own gallant steed hitched with the others, with portmanteau and blankets strapped to the saddle. In the act of mounting him a sudden thought occurred to me, and I acted on it promptly. I had a sharp pocket knife, and a minute sufficed to cut every saddle girth and bridle. Then I mounted my horse and put him to a gallop, which I never allowed him to slacken for five miles. I traveled over twenty miles farther, and never halted till I had found the sheriff of the adjoining county and put myself under his protection. He heard my story, and said:

"A pretty close thing, my friend. They'd have hung you at sight if they'd laid hands on you. But you're safe now; they won't venture over here. I've got warrants for the arrest of more than half of them, and they know it."

I never learned that they were able to make any pursuit that night, but I should think not, after the situation I left them in.

Hard and Easy Lives.

Little Girl—My papa has to get up awful early so as to get to the office and see if his clerks is there attendin' to business.

Little Boy—My papa don't have to. He's one of the clerks.

Nothing Much.

Little Bobby—Mamma, the boys is goin' to have a circus. May I act?

Mamma—Oh, I suppose so. What are you to do?

Little Bobby—Nothin' much. They is goin' to have a pyramid of sixteen boys, an' all I has to do is to stand on top.

It Is To Laugh.

A STRANGE CASE.

Mr. Suburb—Did you get the lawn mower, and cut that grass this morning, as I told you?

Little Son—No, I was sick this mornin', I thort I was goin' to die I was so weak; an' this afternoon I forgot it.

"What have you been doing all the afternoon?"

"Playing tug o' war."

COMPETITIVE LUXURIES.

First Little Girl (just from a shoestore)—I is got on new shoes. You ain't.

Second Little Girl (just from the bathroom)—N-o, but I bet my feets is cleaner than yourn.

AN EXPERT'S OPINION.

Bootblack—Shine, sir?

Gentleman (impatiently)—Cannot you see that my boots are blackened?

Bootblack—Ye-e-s, but it's a bad job. Guess you did it y'self.

HE GATHERS AT THE RIVER.

Little Dot—What church does your papa belong to?

Little Dick—The Baptist, I guess. He always takes his fishing pole along.

A VULGAR FAMILY.

First Little Girl—I guess you folks isn't very respectable."

Second Little Girl—Why isn't we?

First Little Girl—I hasn't see a doctor here once.

NICE AND GOOD.

Aunty—Do you think this cake is nice?

Little Niece (from Boston)—Yes, I easily 'cognize the fact that the proportions of the ingredients are exact to a nicety. That is why it is good.

A SUBSTITUTE.

Sweet Girl Graduate (at a restaurant)—Haven't you any pickles?

Waiter—We got out only a few minutes ago, but we've got plenty of strawberry shortcake, ma'am.

SAVING A STAMP.

Mamma—Why did you put two stamps on this letter? One would have been plenty?

Little Tommy—One of the stamps was tore, and I didn't want to waste it.

NOT IN HARMONY.

Little Dot—Mamma, I mus' have a new doll right away.

Mamma—What is the matter with the old one?

Little Dot—It's got some scwatches on its face, an' it looks sorter shabby along side of Baby.

CATCHING A MAN.

Miss Grabbem—Mr. Richchapp remarked last night that he liked a woman who showed consideration for the feelings of neighbors.

Mrs. Grabbem—You must do something to show him that you are that kind of a woman

Miss Grabbem—Yes, I know—but what?

Little Brother—When he asks you to sing, close the windows.

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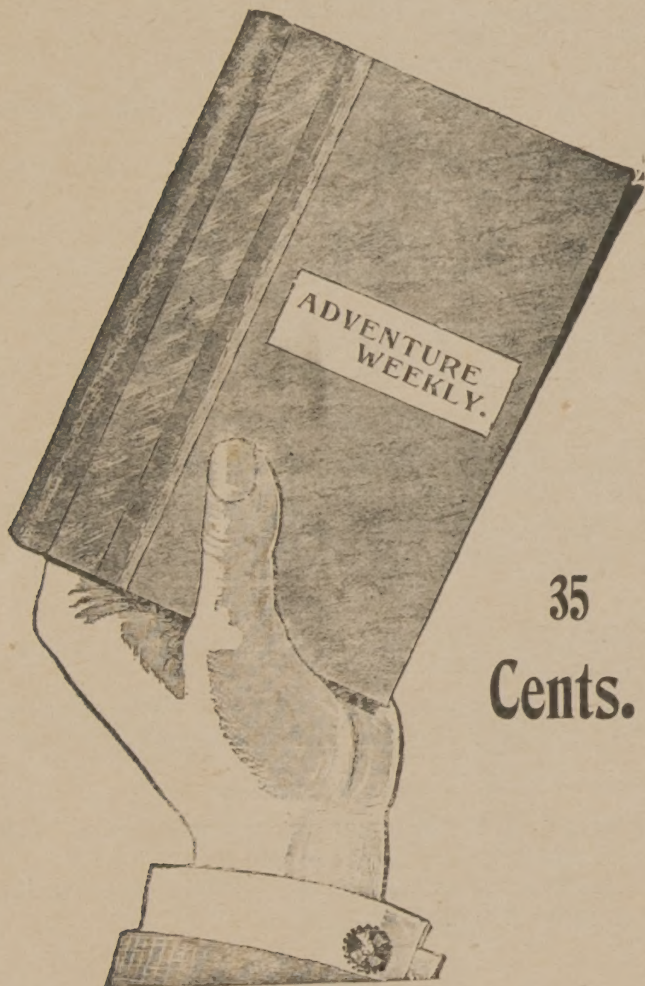
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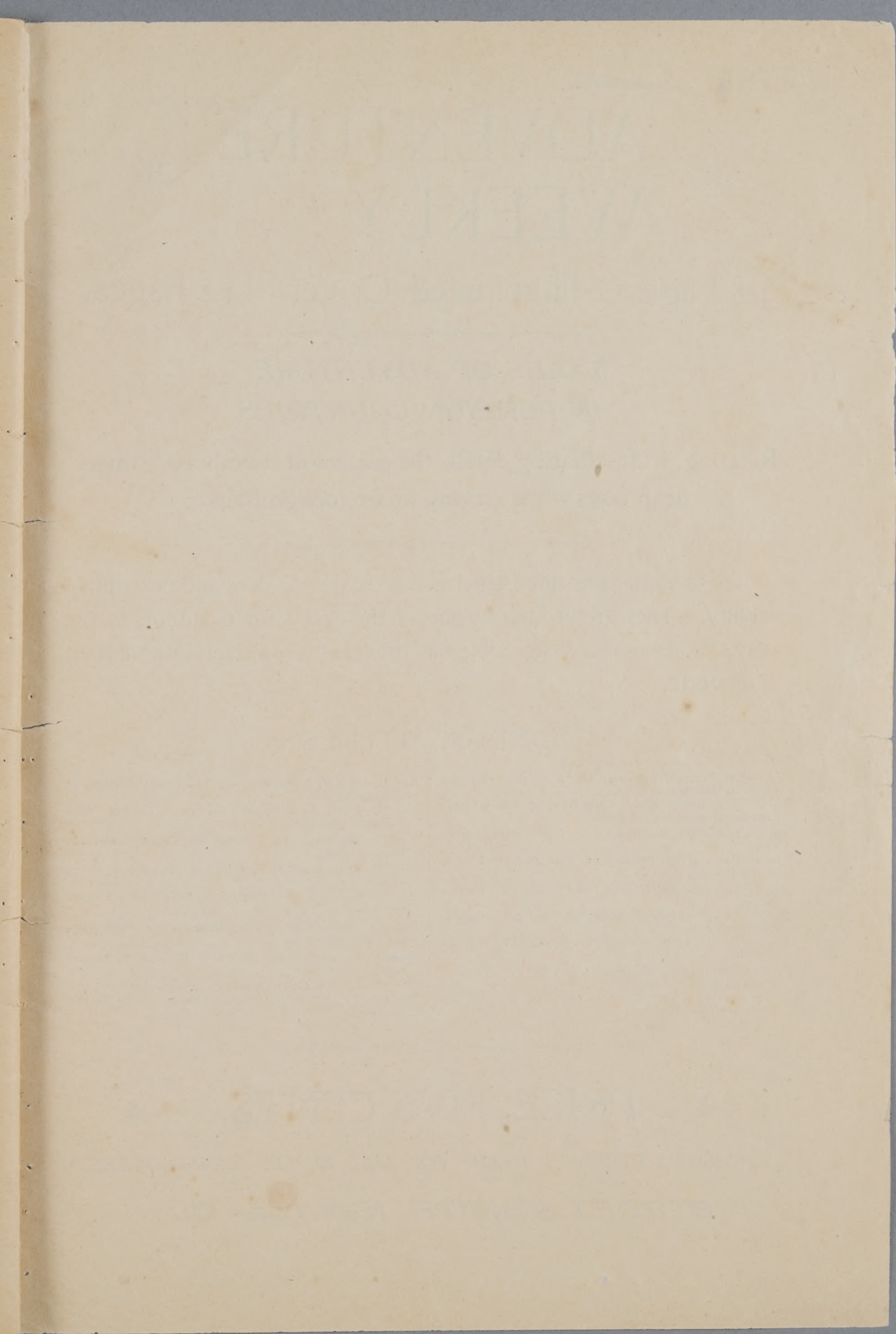
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